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STANDING SOLID –
THE PLACE OF ULTRA-LOCAL NEWS IN A GLOBAL REALITY

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Chapter 1: Introduction – the ultra-local newspapers in the «global village»

1.1 A growing local interest

The small and ultra-local newspapers in Norway have experienced a slow but steady growth in circulation figures and subscriptions since the year 2000. Sigurd Høst's annual report *Avisåret 2007* confirms that, while the national newspapers and the regional newspapers have experienced a decline in circulation figures, the ultra-local newspapers are strengthening their position (Høst, 2008: 25-35). The official 2008-survey on what kind of newspapers Norwegian people read shows the ultra-local are in general stable or growing, while most regional and national papers are confronted with a declining number of readers (Mediebedriftenes Landsforbund, 2009). This trend is also seen in other European countries, for instance in Great Britain (Press Gazette, 2008) (Dagens Medier, 2008). In the United States of America, the growing interest for local news has resulted in close to 1.500 citizen-run Internet websites set up to serve smaller communities and neighbourhoods with online ultra-local journalism (State of the News Media, 2009).

The term ultra-local newspaper is here defined as a paper that publishes one, two or three issues a week in a defined geographical area. Most of them are subscription-papers. One characteristic of the ultra-local newspapers is that the content is in most cases near to 100 percent local information. National affairs or stories of international events hardly ever appear in these newspapers unless there is an obvious local link.

The ultra-local newspapers are experiencing growth in times, where their readers and subscribers become more and more acquainted with the global reality and the effects of globalization. The local newspaper is not anymore the sole provider of advertisements and news in remote areas of Norway. Internet has provided people with a world wide source of information and shopping possibilities. Multiple national and international tv-channels give us news, from around the world, all around the clock. More people than before travel abroad

to work for a shorter or longer period, due to international ownership of local industry and Norwegian companies expanding beyond the national borders.

The local village is in some way challenged by the «global village», a metaphor used by and associated with communications theorist and philosopher Marshall McLuhan (McLuhan, 1964). As early as in 1964, he described how electronic mass media remove barriers of time and space in human communication, and thus enable people able to interact and live on a global scale.

It may seem a paradox that there is an increasing interest in ultra-local newspapers at times when the global influence on people's daily lives is stronger than ever before. Could it be that the ultra-local newspapers provide modern people with something more important than the news as such? In my thesis I have looked for reasons why a «global village» is such a good growth medium for local newspapers.

1.2 Previous research

Marshall McLuhan introduced the term «global village» in 1964 (McLuhan, 1964). Since that time, there has been written numerous books on globalization and the effects of globalization. Research has been conducted on the effects of globalization on economy, politics and democracy, security, society, human relations, identity and mass media (Bauman, 1998) (Giddens, 2002) (Dixon, 2004) (Rupp, 2006) (Scholte, 2005) (Schirato and Webb, 2003) (Steven, 2003) (Stiglitz, 2006).

Traditional studies of media and mass communications frequently make use of surveys or opinion-polls to monitor the popularity of media, its content or people's opinion on matters of interest. The Norwegian survey of newspaper consumption done by Norsk Gallup (Mediebedriftenes Landsforbund, 2009) is an example of such a survey. The yearly statistics of circulation figures of Norwegian newspapers made by TNS Gallup (Mediebedriftenes Landsforbund, 2009) is for instance used by media researcher Sigurd Høst when conducting his yearly research on the status of Norwegian newspapers (Høst, 2008). Peter Steven in his

book on global media refers to Unesco's count of the net exchange of selected cultural goods between the developed and developing countries (Steven, 2003:23).

Researchers also study the frequency of particular words or concepts used in media, to check on how media covers events or subjects, or they count items or articles within a field of interest to see which areas are predominant in the various media. Rachel Eyre and Ralph Negrine have chosen to study the news and current affairs developments in regional television in Great Britain by counting items and length of items shown and sorting them into categories according to topics (Franklin and Murphy, 1998: 36-50). Bob Franklin and John Perry have studied how British local press covered the general election in 1997, by counting the frequency of articles relating to various issues or topics (Franklin and Murphy, 1998: 209-227).

Media anthropology combines concepts from anthropology and ethnographic method with communications research. The object of study of media anthropology is the system of cultural transmission through media. Classical anthropology argues that language is the vehicle of the transmission of culture. In media anthropology, not only face-to-face contact, but also mass communication through media is understood as language (Rothenbuhler and Coman, 2005:42).

Some researchers in the field of media anthropology and globalization have been occupied with the ritual functions of mass media (Rothenbuhler and Coman, 2005). Others have looked upon how new communications technology can be used to create a common identity amongst people in diasporic communities (Liebes and Curran, 1998:103-113). In *Media Worlds* (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod et.al, 2002) the editors have collected research articles and essays on the topics of cultural activity, media and minority claims, cultural politics of nation-states, transnational circuits, social sites of production and the social life of technology.

How mass media are employed to represent and construct cultures is amongst the topics that are dealt with in the volume *The Anthropology of Media - A Reader* (Askew and Wilk, 2002). Some of the media anthropologists who have contributed to the book discuss issues of media in relation to power, imperialism and colonialism. In other articles, the researchers have studied audience response to mass media (Askew and Wilk, 2002: 237-322). While the early

cultural imperialist school of mass media considered audiences as passive, just absorbing what mass media offered them, contemporary research is in addition occupied with how audiences relate what they watch on TV or read in the newspapers to their own personal experiences and contexts. Audiences are now seen as reflexive, not just passive receivers (Liebes and Curran, 1998:26). People will interpret the message of what they read or see on TV in different ways according to their personal horizon of understanding (Dahl, Jensen et.al., 2006:7-22). The very same message will be interpreted in a variety of ways, depending on who the receiver is, what previous experience he or she has and the context in which the message is sent, transmitted and received.

There are three main schools within media anthropology: The cultural imperialist school within anthropological studies of mass media focus on how people are greatly influenced by television and sees culture as a determining behaviour. Audiences are seen as passive receptors. The hermeneutic school argues that television reflects culture to people; people produce culture and on the other hand culture defines people's behaviour. The functionalist school considers television as an integral element of society, so television and its role in society should be studied if one wants to understand people or culture (Rothenbuhler and Coman, 2005: 36-55).

The last decades, globalization and new technology have given more and more people access to media of mass communication. Professor at New York University's Telecommunications Program, Clay Shirky, has named his latest book *Here comes Everybody. How change happens when people come together*. Shirky refers to how the World Wide Web basically makes everyone with a pc and an internet connection a media outlet because previous bottlenecks to public expression that characterized mass media are removed (Shirky, 2008:55).

In *Media Worlds* media anthropologists show how media and mass media are now being used by people in all parts of the world for self-presentation, self-interpretation, cultural activism and maintenance and creation of more or less imagined communities (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod et.al., 2002).

Global studies is an interdisciplinary field of research. Therefore I have in not only used theories from media anthropology, but also made references to literature from the field of mass communication research, and literature written by scholars of sociology.

In my thesis I have combined the emic¹ actor-perspective of my local Norwegian informants with the system-perspective of a media anthropologist and theories of globalization. In doing this, I hope to attract interest to an area of research that has up until now not received much media-anthropological attention; the Norwegian ultra local newspapers and globalization. I am convinced that the tensions that occur and the mechanisms that operate when local and global meet, are important for how our common future will be shaped.

I have used concepts and methods from media anthropology to take a close look at the ultra-local Norwegian newspapers in a global perspective. The local newspapers have had an important position in the Norwegian society since the latter part of the 19th century, and they have served both as «glue and magnifying glass» in their communities (Espeland, 2006). The question is whether globalization will change this.

1.3 Method

Quite early in the process of defining the topic of research, I decided that I would use qualitative research methods and combine theories from relevant literature with in depth interviews with twelve informants. The informants in this study are five editors of ultra-local newspapers in south-western Norway. Four other informants have previous experience in being editor of local papers, of which one works in the National Association of Local Newspapers (Landslaget for Lokalaviser), one is the leader of the Norwegian Media Businesses' Association (Mediebedriftenes Landsforbund), one is a professor of sociology, and one is a member of the Norwegian parliament. A professor of media science, a lawyer, and the sales manager and director of information in the National Association of Local Newspapers, are also among my twelve informants.

¹ Emic and ethic are terms used by anthropologists, and by others in the social and behavioral sciences to refer to two different kinds of data concerning human behavior. An «emic» account is a description of behavior or a belief in terms meaningful to the actor; that is, an emic account comes from within the culture. An «etic» account is a description of a behavior or belief by an observer, in terms that can be applied to other cultures. (Wikipedia, 2009)

In my paper the informants are presented using letters A to L. At the end of the paper I have included a list with information about their occupation, age and gender. This gives the reader the opportunity to check on each informant's detailed background and occupation while reading the thesis.

Quantitative research methods are used to measure changes in reader-figures and subscription-numbers of newspapers. In this study I have made use of the reader-survey made by Mediebedriftenes Landsforbund (MBL) and the statistics referred to in Sigurd Høst's *Avisåret 2007*. My aim has not been to study the figures in detail, but to determine the premises for my qualitative research on local news and globalization. The fact that ultra-local newspapers have gained popularity and readers is such a premise.

Through semi-structured interviews with the 12 informants, who all have relations to and experience from Norwegian local media, I did attempt to find out if and why they believe or do not believe in a future for ultra-local news and newspapers.

I am an editor of an ultra-local newspaper, and I have worked as a local journalist since I finished my journalist education in 1992. My experience from local journalism, working in newsrooms where global issues and world events are disregarded in favour of stories about local people and community, has inspired me to take on this study. Globalization raises new questions as to what is relevant and what is not in a local community, and eventually if ultra-local news will be needed at all when people, to a greater extent, are living on a global scale. Since I undertook this study, I have been conscious that my personal interest and experience from ultra-local newspapers should not influence the results of my research. I have taken care to follow the correct procedures of qualitative research methods and as a researcher kept a professional distance to the topic. While doing fieldwork and writing the master thesis, I have been on leave from my job and thus also had a physical distance to the newsroom.

It has not been my aim to find out whether ultra-local news in the future will be presented printed on paper, on internet or through other electronic media. Nor did I attempt to find out

whether the local news should be provided through subscription, like today's print versions of ultra-local papers, or be distributed free of charge.

The local editors were chosen as informants because they are the ones who decide what the ultra-local papers should be like. All have reflected on their role when it comes to serving the community with information. They make decisions on what the paper should write and should not write, and they look for local angles to global issues.

The five editors all work for different ultra-local papers that are owned by the same media-corporation. Four of the seven additional informants used to be editors in other, independent newspapers. These informants were also chosen because they could provide another perspective to local news and globalization, due to their present occupations or roles. The three last informants have closely observed changes in the Norwegian press and media through several decades, and they were therefore asked to participate in the study.

I made two different interview-guides. The one meant for the editors had specific questions on the situation in their local paper and community, while the one meant for other informants only had general questions. Both guides are attached to this thesis-paper. Amongst the questions I wanted answered were the editors' views on the need for local news, the function of local news, the position of local newspapers. I also asked questions about globalization and local news. At the end of the interview I added some questions about the editor and his/her personal «global connection and global concern».

The interviews each lasted between 90 to 120 minutes and were conducted in Norwegian. Most of the interviews took place in the informants' offices. I conducted one interview in the home of one of the editors, one interview took place in my home, one in the lobby of the university and the interview with the parliament-member took place in an empty lunch-room. I think the informants were comfortable with the interview-situation. Most were in their own environment, they closed the door and almost all of them switched off their telephones so that they could concentrate on answering my questions.

Since I am myself an editor of a local newspaper, we often warmed up with some general talk about media, my studies and the situation in the newspapers before the interview started. This

felt right and important to «set the stage» and to build trust before the questioning started. Still I was aware to keep my distance by not «giving away» my personal opinions or experiences. Most of the editors knew me by name, or I had met them a few times before in official media-settings. One of them used to be my boss and is still a friend that I see 4-5 times a year. I was aware that this could be a bias to my findings, but found that the interview went smooth and professionally, and the data I collected did not in any way seem to be influenced by the fact that we knew each other. It should also be mentioned that we have never before discussed local news and globalization.

There were just one or two instances, while interviewing the editors, where I realized that I had to take care not to get too involved and give feedback that could encourage the informant to answer my questions in a certain way. Surprisingly, this did not occur when interviewing the editor that used to be my boss and is still a friend, but when talking to informants whom I did not know well.

Being reflexive and aware of the fact that my status, being an editor, could affect my own and my informants' behaviour, made me take extra care to behave professionally when conducting the interviews. This meant not giving encouraging feedback or comments that relate to my personal experience or opinions, feedback that can influence the answers I obtain from my informants. It was also obvious to me that I should not tell any of the informants what other informants had told me before.

After the interview, several of the editors were curious to know if there was a great variation in answers between the informants. It could very well be that they were a bit anxious as to whether they had «performed well» in the interview. As journalists and editors they are all used to asking questions, but probably feel more insecure when being interviewed themselves. I therefore assured my informants that although they had all put emphasis on different areas, each of them had given me valuable and useful information.

In addition to doing fieldwork by interviewing the twelve informants, I have collected data for my thesis from various written sources. Books from social sciences like anthropology, sociology and the field of globalization have been used, as well as articles from the internet,

newspapers and magazines. Ever since I first made up my mind to focus my research on ultra-local newspapers and globalization several years ago, I have collected relevant material that could be of use in my research.

1.4 Defining the concepts

Globalization is a word that is used to describe processes of modernization or even postmodernization (Schirato and Webb, 2003:2). In their introduction to the book *Globalization – the Key Concepts* (Mooney and Evans, 2007), Annabelle Mooney and Betsy Evans claim that it is a buzzword of the moment, within universities, government and society. In academic circles, there are many definitions and approaches to globalization simply because it is not a field of study that is restricted to only one discipline.

Jan Aart Scholte describes globalization as the present ongoing large-scale growth of transplanetary, and often also supraterritorial, connectivity (Scholte, 2005:84). Others suggests that globalization is a set of technologies, institutions and networks operating within, and at the same time transforming, contemporary social, cultural, political and economic spheres of technology (Schirato and Webb, 2003). Anthony Giddens has described globalization as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring miles away (Giddens, 1990:64). Together these definitions constitute *the concept of globalization* as it is used in my study.

In the process of analyzing the data, from the fieldwork and the interviews with the twelve informants, it became necessary to develop concepts so that the obtained data could be sorted and categorized. I looked for useful categories that would embrace the informants' various approaches to why local news and local newspapers will be viable in a globalized future. This was challenging, since the informants presented their opinions through an emic perspective and with their own words. The transcripts from all the interviews were thoroughly analyzed and categorized before it was decided that *identity, ritual, filter* and *empowerment* would be the *four key concepts* to be used in this paper.

When informants were asked about what local papers give people and why people buy the ultra-local newspapers, they all said that the papers provide news. That is the most obvious answer. When asked to go more in depth, informants pointed at the concept of identity, which the ultra-local papers can provide people with or strengthen. Ritual, an important term from media-anthropology, was indirectly mentioned both in connection with yearly media-events and in connection with the ritualized activity of receiving and reading the local newspaper.

The concepts of filter and empowerment are not taken from media-anthropology, but have been developed during my process of analyzing the data material from the interviews. The ultra-local newspapers have an important role as filters, eliminating that which is «noise» and not relevant in the local society. The concept of empowerment is closely linked with the news-category. The ultra-local paper provides people with information on matters that concern them, and the it gives people information that enable them to act and participate actively in their local community.

Identity, ritual, filter and empowerment have each been dedicated one separate part of this thesis and the first part of each of these chapters is set to present relevant theoretical material and give a clear definition of the concept and how it has been used in this study. Data collected through fieldwork and from literature will be discussed in relation to the four concepts in the chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5. The last part of the thesis, chapter 6, presents a summary and a discussion of the findings.

1.5 The global challenge for local papers

In the book *Lokalavisa nær og kjær*, written to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the National Association of Local Newspapers, Gard Espeland talks of globalization and the local newspapers:

The basis of the local press is the local community. Without the local community there will be no local paper. What happens to the local communities will therefore influence the local papers.

We can all state that distances become shorter and shorter, the contact with other countries greater and greater, and we see that a lot of major problems are more or less common for us all. Globalization is a key word, and where we used to go in the footsteps of our foremothers and forefathers, we are now picking up inspiration from the whole world.

(Espeland, 2006:97)

Globalization poses new possibilities to the ultra-local newspapers. With new digital technology the smaller newspapers can have a professional layout and look without employing print workers. Internet enables local weekly newspapers, by covering local news on a daily basis, to compete with regional and national daily newspapers. At the moment the limited resources in smaller papers sometimes are a hindrance for it. Via internet, the ultra-local news from a village in Norway can, in theory, be read by millions of people around the world. Yet that hardly ever happens. It has simply not been a goal for local editors to draw the large crowds. They see it as their role to serve their exclusive local public.

Globalization also represents challenges to local newspapers. Globalization of international trade has affected media-ownership. The last few years, international corporations have obtained ownership of several Norwegian local papers. This is likely to affect the structure and the role of the traditional Norwegian newspaper. New owners may decide to close down some of the ultra-local papers that have been important for local communities' identity and coherence. International influence may change the profile and the traditional role of the local papers.

It is important for the editors to have good knowledge of the community they are serving. In order to make a newspaper that is interesting, and a paper that citizens are willing to pay for, a successful editor needs to know what occupies local people. Sensing developments within the local and global community is a part of the editor's job. He or she should keep up with trends in society and in the market in order to be able to face change and new challenges. The editors of ultra-local papers are both news-providers, and they are news-consumers, they provide service for the local community and they are indeed themselves part of the local community they serve.

Newspapers or news-sheets that are either handed out for free in the street or delivered in the mailbox for free have not yet represented a great competition to the traditional Norwegian subscription newspapers, but this could change. These free newspapers now have a very strong position in the media-market both in Denmark and Great Britain. Denmark never had a tradition of ultra-local subscription newspapers. In Britain, there has been a tendency that free newspapers have exacerbated the already dwindling fortunes of the traditional paid-for weekly local newspaper (Franklin and Murphy, 1998:125).

The Norwegian government has since 1969 supported various printed media with a yearly amount of money called «pressestøtte» (Espeland, 2006:108-111). This support was initiated because of fear that the strongest newspapers would take over the market and their competitors would cease to exist. Politicians were afraid that, if this happened, it would be the end of a differentiated press in Norway. If the national politicians decide that the financial support to the press should end, it would have severe consequences for a lot of local newspapers.

The global challenges of foreign ownership, news on the internet versus printed news, the government's financial support and the potential threat of free newspapers will not be discussed further in this paper. The focus will be on what reasons there may be why people will still want the ultra-local news although living in a globalized world. It is not the aim of this study to predict whether these news will be provided through the internet or on printed paper, whether they will be free or paid-for.

If time and space collapse, and people live on a global scale, one could suspect that a newspaper, that focuses on news from a geographically defined community of 6000 to 50.000 inhabitants only, would be superfluous. Yet the twelve informants of this study are all convinced that there will be need for ultra-local news in future. One of the initial questions in my interviews was simply if the informants believed in a future for local news and local newspapers. All believed that there will be a demand for local news in the years to come. After the editors' belief in a future for local news had been confirmed, my follow-up questions were concerned with finding possible reasons why people will keep and even turn

to local news in future. Five of the informants even predicted a greater demand for local information as our world becomes more globalized.

In the next four chapters I will discuss rituals, identity, filter and empowerment, four concepts that can be used to explain why globalization seems to increase the interest for ultra-local news.

Chapter 2: Rituals - the never-ending story

2.1 Ritual theory and ritualization

Senior Lecturer in Media and Communications at the London School of Media and Political Science, Nick Couldry, in his article *Media Rituals-Beyond Functionalism* (Rothenbuhler and Coman, 2005:59-69) describes how a recent approach to media research seeks to work not just on the level of media text and institutions, but on the broader and more subtle ways in which the very existence of media transforms our societies. Couldry calls for a greater flexibility to the term ritual. The term has often been associated with claims that it produces, or maintains, social integration. This is in accordance with French sociologist Émile Durkheim's functionalist approach.

Couldry calls for a non-functionalist approach to rituals, being less interested in rituals for themselves, and more interested in the wider social processes of «ritualization», through which something like ritual, or media ritual, comes into being at all (Rothenbuhler and Coman, 2005:63). Professor of Religious Studies at Santa Clara University, Catherine Bell, has in her work dealt with the characteristics of ritual-like activities and ritualization. She has listed six characteristics of ritual-like activities: formalism, traditionalism, invariance, rule-governance, sacral symbolism and performance. In demonstrating how a variety of common activities are ritualized, Bell illustrates general processes of ritualization as flexible and strategic ways of acting (Bell, 1997:138).

Catherine Bell claims that ritualization is first and foremost a strategy for the construction of certain types of power relationships effective within particular social organizations (Bell, 1992:197). Couldry supports this view in his call for a shift of emphasis in ritual analysis from questions of meaning toward questions of power.

Nick Couldry describes media rituals as «actions that can stand in for wider values and frameworks of understanding connected with the media». Media rituals naturalize order and formalize categories and the boundaries between categories. This is done in performances

that make the boundaries seem natural and legitimate. He mentions the organization of ritualized meetings with celebrities, that revolve around the distinction between the «media person» (or celebrity) and the «ordinary person», as an example of a media rite.

The study of the royal wedding of Charles and Diana, made by Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, illustrate how media events are ritualized. Dayan and Katz studied and pointed out the different effects of the media ritual on those participants who were in the streets watching and those watching it on television. Dayan and Katz defined five social functions of media rites: testimonial, monumentalization, legitimization, vectorization and dramatization (Rothenbuhler and Coman, 2005:74-77). Using Dayan and Katz' terminology, the local newspaper legitimizes activities in the local community and vectorizes the local events. By mirroring the community, the ultra-local newspaper bears testimony to local events. Dramatization is used to create local involvement and monumentalization is used to distinguish extraordinary events from daily life.

Media rituals are not something exclusive for television broadcasting from events that have world-wide interest, like a royal wedding or the Pope's visit to Reunion (Rothenbuhler and Coman, 2005:165-175). In this chapter, part 2.2, I will demonstrate how ultra-local newspapers engage in rituals in their local communities. These rituals have the six characteristics of ritual-like activities that are listed by Catherine Bell. They are formalized and rule-governed, have sacral symbolism, draw upon traditionalism and invariance. Indeed, they do also represent a performance and a dramatization. In accordance with the functionalist tradition, these rites have an important function in producing and maintaining social integration and affirming what the members of a community share in common.

The distribution of power to influence the representations of social «reality» is dealt with in part 2.3 of this chapter, in accordance with a non-functional approach to of media rituals. It is beyond doubt that ultra-local newspapers are in a position to allocate and dislocate power in the local community through their coverage of local media events. The local newspaper bears testimony to what has happened in the local community, it legitimates and vectorizes events and actors and thus has influence on the distribution of power. The power of the local newspaper itself is also subject to constant negotiations, since it is eventually the media-

consumers who empower the media. Rituals seek to affirm the position of ultra-local media and the coherence of the community.

The routine action of reading the local newspaper is in part 2.4 analyzed in terms of being a ritualized activity. Ritual-like behaviour demonstrates the importance of the body and its way of moving in space and time. Reading the local newspaper, in a certain way at certain days of the week, is an activity that for many readers evoke one or more of Catherine Bell's six features of ritual-like activities.

2.2 Same procedure as last year

Every local journalist knows very well that there are certain annual media events that are compulsory for the ultra-local newspaper. There is no way these events can be ignored without grave consequences for the paper, because it is expected by the public and by the authorities that «our paper takes part in our rituals». Examples of such events are annual summer-festivals arranged by the community's association of shop-owners and merchants, and the community gathering in December when the Mayor lights the candles on the Christmas tree in the town square while local brass bands and choirs play and sing Christmas carols. The celebration of Norway's Constitution Day, 17th of May, is another grand ritualized media event with its formalized activities and sacral symbolism, that are the same year after year, in cities, towns and villages all over Norway.

These media events are not news in the strict sense of the word. They are arranged every year at the same time and the same place, and those who have taken part once before will have a pretty good idea of what is about to happen. The news-value of these media events is very limited indeed, still they are considered to be of immense importance to the local newspaper and the community. One editor, informant H, even points to there being a yearly cycle of media rituals, where the same events and topics feature in articles every year at the same time:

If you look at these books on the shelves, they contain all our newspapers from the years that have passed. Now, if you look up January in the various books, you will see that we often write about the

same topics at the same time of year. We could have decided not to do so, but it has become a ritual. Something like; «it is this time of year, so it is about time we write about this».

(Editor H)

The informant thinks this yearly cycle and the ritual of repeating topics may be due to the paper's ultra-local function and the fact that there is not always a great deal of events that compete for the paper's attention. He also points at those formalized annual events that the paper writes about, not because they are seen as important news by journalists, but because people expect the local paper to be present and cover them. School performances, NGO-meetings and local brass band concerts are examples of this. The ultra-local newspaper often faces fierce criticism if it fails to cover these ritualized activities. Informant I, general secretary of the National Association of Local Newspapers (LLA), reflected upon this:

You will have the harshest criticism if the newspaper has not been present to cover a local event. That is in itself positive, because it shows that the paper's presence is desired. It would have been worse if people didn't care.

(Informant I)

Rituals, like 17th of May or the lighting of the Christmas tree in early December, produce and maintain a sense of social integration. They are dramatized in the sense that there is invariance and a set order of ritualized performance. Informant J, a scholar of sociology, considers these media-events to be important to the incorporation and formation of a common set of values in a local society.

Nowadays, people have a more outward orientation, but their local life will still be impoverished if they do not orient themselves towards the local. The community will wear away. Local pictures in the paper of a beautiful sunset or people who are celebrating their anniversaries, and the article on the annual jumble sale or bazaar at the meeting-house are important to constitute and preserve the «great we» of the local community.

(Informant J)

Ritual plays a key role in maintaining the system, and a social role in securing and maintaining the unity of the group. The ultra-local newspapers manifest the image of group unity and common values through their participation in and articles about local events like

the 17th of May. If media ignored that event, or failed to ritualize it by writing about it as is expected, it would be a way of questioning the community core values. The significance of the local community and the ritual as such were likely to be discussed in the aftermath, since the local paper is both seen as a part of and a reflection of local society.

2.3 Legitimizing and vectorizing

Using a non-functionalist approach to media rituals, the emphasis of ritual analysis can be shifted away from questions of meaning and toward questions of power. There is a clear link between ritual and power in ultra-local media's position in society. There is a historic concentration of symbolic power in the media institutions (Rothenbuhler and Coman, 2005:64-54). Media represents a transcendental «value» based on their presumed ability to represent the social whole, and media ascribes power through ritual events.

Media rituals can replicate and naturalize a broader hierarchy between people, things and places. The local editor decides what should be in the paper and what should not. Categories are formalized, and boundaries within the local community are legitimized through the local newspaper's covering of ritual events. This power also helps reinforce the special status of the local newspaper in the community.

Informant H gave an example of how he as an editor had changed a media-ritual in his newspaper. The newspaper had at the end of December each year published speeches written by the Mayors in their local region. In their speeches, the Mayors would sum up the year that had passed and express their wishes for the year to come. The editor decided that the paper should end the practice of publishing the speeches.

These speeches have always been in our paper at the end of the year. We decided to end the practice two years ago, after having discussed it with one of the Mayors. I think it was a practice that started when the paper was owned by the local authorities. The speeches were much about the same every year, only the words were a bit different. After the speeches did not appear in the paper, we got negative reactions from some of our readers. They had expected the speeches to be there, because it was a ritual.

(Editor H)

The Mayors' speeches can be used as an example of a media ritual where the ultra-local newspaper ascribed power to the political leaders in giving them the chance to express themselves freely in a ritual form at a specific time of year. This is a way of legitimizing the importance and the power of the Mayors.

Israeli media anthropologists Elihu Katz and Daniel Dayan have defined five social functions of media rites (Rothenbuhler and Coman, 2005:75-76). Legitimization and vectorization are two of these functions. The three others are the testimonial function, monumentalization and dramatization. In the example from informant H's paper, the vectorization of the yearly ritual by refusing to print the speeches in the paper could imply that the Mayors' influence on the local communities has been or will be reduced. Legitimization of the power of the local authorities is closely linked with how the local media treats the politicians and people in important positions.

On the other hand, the position of local media and the local newspapers is itself dependant upon social legitimacy. The power of local media to distinct between important and not important, by vectorizing events and by choosing whether or not to print the Mayors' ritual speeches, is actually working to ascribe power to media itself as well as to those who are placed in media.

Informant G, the editor of a local newspaper that publishes three times a week, experienced that the ritual speech of the Mayor was used to criticize his newspaper. Local mayors often hold a reception at the beginning of each year, and the speech is an important formalized part of their ritual performance. At the receptions, local talents from sports and civil society are rewarded, and local choirs and bands entertain the public. The ultra-local newspapers are expected to attend and write about these events.

In his new-year speech, the Mayor mentioned our paper as an example of how local newspapers can end up going very wrong. This particular mayor thinks that we portray his organization in a less flattering light than what is appropriate. We listen to what he is saying, but there is not really much to it.

(Editor G)

The strong intrinsic power of the ritual media event was here used by the Mayor to attack the local newspaper for being unfair in criticizing him and his organization. The editor and the media itself are in the powerful position to decide whether or not the mayor's fierce criticism will be known to others than those who were physically present at the event. The editor also has the power to decide whether the Mayor's statement should be used as a vector to repeat the criticism they had in the first place and even further criticise him and his organization for attempting to interfere in the work of the independent newspaper.

2.4 Thursday is «Fjuken-day»

Having discussed local newspapers' ritual functions and the power of media rituals, there is another ritual aspect that should be mentioned. Subscribers to ultra-local newspapers often develop ritual-like practice in connection with fetching and reading their papers. For many this has become ritualized activity that differs from other routine behaviour. It can imply the characteristics of repetition, invariance, formalism, rule-governance and physical performance.

Catherine Bell talks of a ritualized body environment (Bell, 1992:90-98). When the body interacts with a structured and structuring environment, the ritualized body is produced. Strategies of ritualization are particularly rooted in the body, and in the interaction of the body within a symbolically spatial and temporal environment.

The ritual of reading newspapers, however, does not only apply for the ultra-local newspaper. So why is the ritual stronger with local newspapers than with the national ones? Reasons might be threefold. Firstly it might be because of the fact that the articles have a close relationship with the community and are therefore valued more, secondly for national news there are much more resources to get the news in an other manner, and thirdly the distribution rate of the national papers are much higher, so if you miss out one day the next morning there will be another one.

In this study, the informants have to a various degree stressed the importance of the bodily practice in the readers' relation to the local newspaper. The feeling of holding a fresh newspaper in the hands and turning the pages is by Informant B, the sales manager and director of information in LLA, defined as a ritual activity:

The local newspaper is still part of a daily or weekly ritual. A lot of people now read the national papers on the Internet, but having the printed version of the local paper is still part of a ritual. Even young people sit down with a cup of coffee or a bottle of Coke and read their local newspaper from the first to the last page. We do however not take for granted that it will continue like this, so we are concerned with what we can do to become more attractive to children and young readers.

(Informant B)

Other informants did also mention the fact that the ultra-local subscription newspapers have so far kept or strengthened their position, as if people prefer to have their local news presented on paper while they don't mind reading national or international news on the Internet. The majority of the editors interviewed in this study, considered that the ritualized physical activity of receiving the paper in the mailbox, holding it in the hands and reading it, is very important for a great deal of the readers.

Ritual like behaviour could mean reading the paper at a certain time of the day, in a special chair or consuming it at the kitchen table together with a cup of tea or coffee. It could also imply certain ways of reading the paper, for instance starting with the sports pages or reading it from first to last page. Informant I gave an example of a woman who had given the name «Fjuken-day» to Thursday, naming one day of the week after her local newspaper «Fjuken».

She told me how every Thursday is a day of celebration for her and her husband, and how they always put the kettle on before they fetch the mail. It is «Fjuken-day» with double joy, coffee and the local newspaper. It is a joyful day when the paper provides the couple with an overview of what is going on in their local community.

(Informant I)

Editor F describes how she sees the great value of her paper being the centre of attention in the homes of people in the local community.

The fact that our newspaper is placed on the kitchen table where four point something local citizens read it... That is something we consider very valuable for our product's position in the market and our position as actors in the local community.

(Editor F)

Informant J, who is a lecturer of sociology, said he wouldn't be surprised if people chose to read the local paper before they read the regional and the national paper on those days when the local paper publishes. Informants also told stories of how people are upset if their subscription paper is delayed or not delivered at the right time. If the paper does not arrive as it should, this obstructs the ritualized activity of reading it. It makes a «Fjuken-day» into a day of frustration instead of celebration. Editor H described how people express that «their day is ruined» if they do not get the paper.

2.5 A confirmation of consistency

In producing and maintaining social integration, through the participation in and covering of ritual events in the local community, the ultra-local newspapers affirm a sense of community and belonging. The local newspapers' articles from events like the 17th of May or the Mayors' reception in early January bear the characteristics of performance, formality, symbolism, traditionalism, rule-governance and invariance. These media rituals have a function in confirming the importance of the local community, reassuring citizens that their local event is of significance.

Through their ultra-local newspaper, citizens also get a confirmation and a reassurance that their community and their surroundings are stable and reliable. The ritual events take place every year at a fixed time, and the local newspaper is there to take part and to bear witness. Using the terminology of Dayan and Katz' five social functions of media rites, the local newspaper is testimonial, and its testimony gives readers an affirmation of belonging and security.

Looking at the power aspect of ritual media in local societies, using a non-functionalist approach, the ultra-local newspapers play a role in legitimizing the existing hierarchy within

local society. When local media writes about the reception that is held by the Mayor, it indirectly legitimizes the role of the Mayor as an important figure in the local community and monumentalizes the event. This vectorization is a way of allocating power.

When the local editor, Informant H, decided not to follow the tradition of printing the annual speech of the Mayors in his paper, this in some way implied a removal of symbolic power from the Mayors' hands. At the same time, this grip may have given the newspaper more power. Even though some readers complained that the ritual speeches were missing, the editor demonstrated that the paper was more than a servile organ for the municipal authorities. All my editor informants made it clear that their newspaper exists to serve the public and the local community, not to serve the local authorities. When the importance and influence of the local authorities in society decrease, the editor increases the intrinsic power of his own paper by excluding the Mayors' speeches from his publication.

The power-aspect of media rituals may work to confirm existing power-relations within society. The local newspaper's histories of annual events where the local Mayor honours local sports-talents, or the speech that each year sums up the status of the local community, will convey to the local citizens that there is stability and set boundaries in their society. The yearly cycle of local events can be predicted, power-structures are confirmed and boundaries are set through media's rituals.

It could also be that the subscribers, who each week or several times a week look forward to reading their paper in a set way, experience a sense of comfort and security in this ritualized practice. Subscribers' ritualization of the practice of reading the paper-version of ultra-local newspapers is something that could be object of further study.

The ritual functions of local media are important to confirm community coherence, local traditions and power-structures. Ritual-like routines make people feel that they are safe and in control of their immediate surroundings. Reading the local newspaper can also give people a sense of security because they know what is going on in their neighbourhood.

Chapter 3: Identity – part of the community

3.1 Identity and modernity

The ultra-local newspaper is an important factor in creating local identity, something all my informants mentioned in the interviews. The question I will discuss in this chapter is whether globalization weakens or strengthens the ultra-local identity and what consequences this has for the ultra-local newspapers.

Identities can be defined as the constructions of being, belonging, and this holds key significance in both defining the self and forging collective bonds with others (Scholte, 2005:224). Identity is both who you are, and who you are in relation to others. It is widely recognized that nationality ranked as the predominant world structure of collective identity prior to large-scale globalization. Globalization has weakened national identities, and new technology has made it possible for people to orient themselves outwards when looking for a personal identity.

Anthony Giddens describes how lineage, gender, social status and other attributes relative to identity were all relatively fixed in medieval Europe (Giddens, 1991). If you were born as the eldest son of a Norwegian farmer, you would inherit the farm and be expected to follow traditions. Your identity was likely to embody the elements of being a man, a father and a husband, a farmer, belonging to the local church, the local village and being a Norwegian.

In our post-traditional global social universe in which the reordering of time and space realigns the local with the global, the self undergoes a massive change. Modernity confronts the individual with a complex diversity of choices and gives little help as to which options that should be selected.

Scholte (2005) gives examples of how non-territorial identities can be constructed on a basis of humanity, religion, class, gender, race, youth or sexual orientation. Whereas national identities involve attachment to a particular homeland, these and other aspects of being are

not bound to territorial location. Accelerated growth of global relations in the last decades has gone hand in hand with a growth in transplanetary identities. In addition to this, migration has lead to more people with plural national identities. Daniel Dayan (Liebes and Curran, 1998:106) mentions the problem a person may have choosing amongst proposed identities. In our modern times, identity is dynamic, flexible and subject to change (Bausinger, 1999:13).

The national association of Norwegian local newspapers, Landslaget for Lokalaviser (LLA), have stated that construction of identity as one of the important tasks and functions of the local newspapers (Espeland, 2006:27). The local newspaper should be «glue and magnifying glass», creating and maintaining a common identity and monitoring what is going on in the local community. Espeland claims that the lack of places where people can meet, like the post office or a shop, can work to weaken the feeling of a common identity in a local community. He also thinks that international entertainment-shows and centralized national news on television can work in the same direction.

The ultra-local newspapers have traditionally played an important role in creating and maintaining local identity in Norway. On the one hand, the paper focuses on local culture and identity, and on the other hand it mirrors the things that take place within the defined geographical borders. In our modern times, national identities are weakened and the global reality poses individuals with a choice of multiple affiliations. New identities can be composed, and hybrid identities created. The ultra-local newspapers offer people a relation to local society and an interpretation of local identity. When the national identities are weakened, the local identities often grow stronger than they were before.

In his article «Particularistic media and diasporic communications», Daniel Dayan talks of how early theories of globalization leading to homogenization, a dominating centre and a dominated periphery, are now abandoned (Liebes and Curran, 1998:103-113). The local is no longer the end of the road, the final and lowly destination of messages emanating from a lofty centre. The local is in itself an important centre, and the local newspapers are tools for identity-creation in their local communities.

3.2 Tradition and tribalism

Anthony Giddens points to the very idea of tradition as a creation of modernity. All traditions are invented and consciously constructed, and they can be subject to change. Giddens' view is that traditions are needed and will always persist because they give continuity and form to life. Traditions are resurgent, but not in the sense that life is lived the traditional way.

Subscribing to and reading the local newspaper has been a tradition for people in Norway. The local newspaper strengthens the collective community identity and gives each individual the chance to be reflexive when it comes to personal identity. When globalization and modernity present people with more choices and render them the task of constructing their own identity, the ultra-local newspaper can offer a help by giving a fixation point for local affiliation.

Sociologist Erik Fossåskaret wrote an article for the local newspaper *Hardanger Folkeblad* when the paper celebrated its 130th anniversary in December 2003. He emphasizes how the local newspaper is both a bridge bringing home those who have moved away from the local community, and it acts to create bonds between people who originate from the same geographical area but have moved to other places. They find that they have something in common, being able to discuss news and events that are referred to in the local newspaper from their home region (Fossåskaret, 2003).

Two of my informants, C and F, are editors in newspapers that publish in communities just ten minutes drive from Norway's fourth biggest city. Their communities have grown fast the last decade, with new people moving in and traditional society changing. In the eyes of some people, these communities are suburbs and should be included in the city as such. Informant A, a professor of media science, sees it as a challenge for these newspapers to nurture local identity. It is much easier to construct a collective identity in isolated villages than in places where the population grows fast because people move in from other areas. Research also shows that people who have moved to a new area are less likely to subscribe to the local newspaper. It takes 10 to 15 years before they are on the same level as the original population when it comes to subscribing to the local paper.

Our community is a bit different. It is positioned in the shadow of the big city, and people perceive it as such. We are struggling with the «little-brother feeling», but this town wants to be independent. Being independent means constructing a distinct local identity, and then one has to look at what it takes to build identity in a long-term perspective. We make the only newspaper that is 100 percent local, a paper that takes this community seriously.

(Editor C)

Editor C believes that his newspaper will win the public and create social coherence through presenting a good journalistic product where subscribers can find identity and recognition. He sees it as a challenge that a number of the people employed in the municipality administration live in the city, not in the local community. The fact that they live in the city affects their personal identity and the way the local newspaper is perceived. The local politicians do all live in the community that they govern, and C feels that they do in general have a better understanding of the importance of having an ultra-local newspaper that does focus exclusively on their area.

Patrick Dixon talks of tribalism as one of the six faces of global change, the others being fast, urban, ethical, radical and universal (Dixon, 2004). He defines tribalism as what makes people different, and sees tribalism in any group of people who agree to belong together. Patrick Dixon's prediction is that the greater the globalization, the greater the tribalism. Negative aspects of tribalism can be nationalism, racism, elitism and sectarianism, but tribalism can also be a positive force.

Tribalism is the basis of all family, team and belonging. Tribalism provides a sense of identity. Tribalism helps us understand who we are, where we've come from and where we're headed. Teams are to do with tasks, tribes are about whole groups moving together.

Tribes hold the whole of society in a common community. Neighbourhoods are tribes, members of sports clubs are tribes, football supporters are tribes. If there were no tribes, human beings would create them in a day. We need our tribes to exist, to make sense of our world.

(Dixon, 2004:149)

The words tradition and identity were frequently used by informants in defining elements that make people appreciate and subscribe to their ultra-local newspaper. The concepts of tribe

and tribalism, as they are used by Patric Dixon, can also be useful in looking at why there has been a growing interest for ultra-local news. However, as editors C and F are well aware of, some tribes are stronger and have a greater coherence than others. Editor F has worked in two local newspapers. She sees a clear difference between the strong tribalism in the rural area where she worked before, and the lack of strong patriotism and local identity in the suburban community where she is now editor of the local paper².

I have not been able to play the patriotism-card here in Smallville like I could do in the other newspaper. The core of people who define themselves as being local is not so big in Smallville. There is also a more significant cultural difference between people in Agriland and the city compared to people here in Smallville and people in the city. A lot of people here define the place where they live as the outskirts of the city. The question is really if you obtain a local identity once you move to a house within Smallville's borders. You are defined as a local citizen when you live here, but it does not necessarily mean that you feel like one. In Agriland, most people have the same local names and they have family-ties to farms in the area. Something happens with the identity when there is a development from agricultural society to modern society.

(Editor F)

Editor F has developed a strategy for how to integrate the newcomers and how make them feel like they need the local newspaper. This strategy has so far worked well, rendering the paper a record-breaking growth in both subscription- and reader-figures in 2007.

We ask ourselves what connects the new citizens with the local community, and the answer is things like school, kindergarten, jobs and real estate. Later on their circle of interest grows to include civil society, organizations and sports clubs.

(Editor F)

Editor H admits that it is a challenge to recruit newcomers to the local community as subscribers, but he is convinced that many of them will feel the need for the local paper after some time. H considers it an advantage for the newspaper that there is a strong local identity in his local community and that the collective identity is stronger there compared to what it is

² The rural area is in the following quotation named «Agriland» while the suburban community is called «Smallville». These are fictive names.

in areas closer to the big city. Answering the question of what mistakes local editors should be aware not to make, he mentions forgetting the local identity.

You are going to lose if you can not construct a local identity. The newspaper of Editor C, is struggling with that, maybe because there is no distinct and separate identity in that community. You often find the local identity in the suburbs, the villages and the smaller communities. Therefore it is important that the newspaper does not only focus on the town or neighbourhood where it has its main office. You have to listen to the readers and to what they want. It can be fatal to ignore their desires or to write for some segments of the population only.

(Editor H)

Politicians and lay-people are currently discussing whether the smaller communities should join together in bigger units or become part of the big cities. Several of the informants expressed that this would pose a challenge to the local identities, and that it could in worst case make the ultra-local newspaper irrelevant. Local newspapers thrive on local identity, but their strength is also to observe and tell people about the state of the local democracy. If the local municipality ceases to exist and decisions are made outside of the local community, there will be a less stable foundation upon which to build a collective identity.

Other informants see larger administrative units as an advantage for their newspaper, since they do at present write about three or more separate small communities. A change would most likely lead to one local council and administration being responsible for all three. This would provide even better conditions for constructing a collective local identity in the region. Editor G welcomes a development towards bigger and fewer administrative units, since the geographical area that his newspaper covers consists of 3 separate communities that may in future be joined together in one.

The importance of local identity and pride in being a member of a particular local community or «tribe» is something that G reflected upon. In his region, a rural area 30-50 minutes drive south of the big city, local tribalism and self-confidence has grown stronger the last five decades. The local newspaper has strengthened the idea of a collective identity in the region, and G is convinced that the paper has played an important role in making people feel self-confident and proud of their local identity.

When we were children, we would try to moderate and change our dialect when visiting other places. We thought it sounded so ugly when our dialect was spoken on the radio. But nowadays more and more people, who we do not ourselves consider local, describe themselves by using the word we have for people native to this area. Even people who come from the big city claim to belong to our region. They would never have said so 20 or 30 years ago. People feel quite another confidence in being from this area now, compared to when I was a child and youth.

(Editor G)

Editor G's experience supports Patrick Dixon's notion of a growing tribal awareness in our modern, globalized world. Many people are in search of tribe and tradition, and the local newspapers help them create bonds and feel affiliation to their local communities.

3.3 Belonging somewhere

The turn toward plural, multidimensional and hybrid identities has removed the security and predictability that marked a territorialized world where one's collective identity tended to be defined by nationality connected to a corresponding state. Globalization has had mixed impacts on identity. On one hand, transworld relations have shown possibilities of cultural revival and innovation, and on the other hand it has shown potential of violent cultural homogenization (Scholte, 2005: 304-306).

Most of my informants held the view that globalization will lead to a search for local identity amongst individuals, and that this is an advantage for their ultra-local newspapers. They think local roots and a familiar place to return to will mean more to people in the global village.

The more the world becomes fragmented and without boundaries, the more important it will be for people to take root in something. The ultra-local media have by a sudden become very trendy, although we are actually still doing what we have always been doing.

(Informant D)

Informant D owns several ultra-local newspapers. He used to be the editor of a local paper and is now the chairman of the board of Mediebedriftenes Landsforening, the Norwegian Media Businesses' Association. He is convinced that people will be more occupied with the local as the global village expands. Informant I shares this view:

Words of honour, like identity, can also be used to describe the function of ultra-local newspapers. Seeing pictures in the paper of neighbours and people that you know provides you with a feeling of belonging and identity. I have spent some time thinking about the massive choice of TV-channels and internet, and the fact that people travel much more than they used to. I live in a village, but my neighbours have been to China and celebrated Christmas in Zanzibar. When they are so interested in the world, will the local community not be too small for their interest? No, it won't.

(Informant I)

3.4 Being «one of us»

The ultra-local newspapers have traditionally been perceived by other media-actors as not being tough enough, cheering on local authorities and local football-teams in stead of asking critical questions and living up to the role of the press as a «watchdog» in society. All the informants that were interviewed held the opinion that this had changed a lot the last decades, due to increased professionalism and more resources in the local press. This has earned the local papers greater recognition in the media-world. The fact that Informant D was elected chairman of the Norwegian Media Businesses' Association can be seen as a confirmation of this increased respect for the ultra-local actors in Norwegian media.

The ultra-local newspapers are not anymore just cheering along their local candidates. The editors see it as very important that the papers ask critical questions and dare to focus on problems in the local society. Still, the editors of the ultra-local newspapers are aware that they have to balance their critical articles with local information that serves to strengthen and confirm local identity. Informant A, a professor of media science, sees the challenge in balancing the watchdog function with supporting the local community and identity:

The local editors have to take care not to fall out with their local community. Some editors have done that. Critical journalism is fine, but implied there should always be an understanding that the newspaper wants what is best for the community. The position of the local newspaper will be in danger if the community feels that «the newspaper is not on our side».

(Informant A)

Journalists do appreciate «hard news» and often see investigative journalism as the top achievement and ideal. Writing features from ritual events or portrait interviews with local

people does not hold the same status amongst the professionals. The informants that have been interviewed in this study state that their newspapers undertake critical investigations of local issues. At the same time, they all emphasize that the local paper also has to write about the daily life in the community. The non-controversial articles that «glue people together» and strengthen local identity are just as important as investigative journalism and big headlines. The editors themselves often consider this trivia and second-class content, but they know that their readers appreciate it and expect it to be in the paper.

I think the majority wants cozy articles and trivia that I call «tittle-tattle», but I also think we have reached new groups of readers because of the professionalization. People in their thirties want more critical journalism than the elders do. It also depends on people's level of education. People with higher education, and those who have travelled and experienced more, have not got the same opinion on journalism as those who have lived in the same village all their life.

(Editor E)

Editor G is provoked when he hears people say that the local newspapers just write about cute and cozy local events. He says that he and his paper are not at all afraid to investigate local issues and write critical articles when it is appropriate.

The ultra-local newspaper is a supplement. You do not read the local newspaper if you want to know what is going on in Gaza or Oslo, but people know that. They have expectations to what they will find in their local paper, and we should live up to those expectations. At the same time, we have to train our readers. If we wrote a critical article 15 or 20 years ago, people would accuse us of writing like the national tabloid papers. We do not hear that anymore. You have to let your readers get used to it, little by little.

(Informant G)

Editor C reflected upon how national media can be more direct and fierce in their approach when writing about local issues and tragedies, while local newspapers take on another role.

A local newspaper is going to live in that community, even after a big catastrophe or media-event is over. We can not trample in with steel-toe shoes and kick to the left and to the right. There are more nuances in what we write, because we are going to exist in that community long after the media-event is over. We go more into depth and are to a greater degree able to explain to people what is happening. There is of course a danger that we will be too careful with what we do and do not write. You can

always claim that it is wise to have an outside-perspective, but that is something other media will always provide.

(Editor C)

Here C expresses that the newspaper is doing much more than serving the local community with news. The ultra-local newspaper is often considered an essential part of the community's collective identity, and it is therefore expected that the newspaper acts like it is «one of us», supporting what is good for the community as such. This is often a dilemma for local editors and journalists, because good news-stories often demand a critical focus on issues. In the opinion of readers and community-leaders, critical focus or any media focus on sensitive topics can be seen as if the newspaper is doing harm to the local community and collective identity.

3.5 A provider of identity

Throughout this chapter I have tried to demonstrate how the ultra-local newspapers are providers of, and in themselves a part of, people's local identity. In *Language, Culture and Identity* (Riley, 2007), Philip Riley describes identity as a quality which is ascribed or attributed to an individual human being by others. The local newspaper has an important function in ascribing qualities to the local community and its citizens. Riley writes about social identity that «you are what you know» (Riley, 2007:86). Subscribers to the ultra-local newspaper have more local knowledge, and are thus more likely to have a strong local identity compared to those who do not read the local newspaper.

Informant E holds the opinion that reading the local newspaper is the best way to get to know the local community and become integrated. Informant I thinks that the local editors should take a greater responsibility in using their paper to integrate immigrants in the local society. He says that immigrants have to be visible in the newspaper-articles and portrayed in a respectful way if they are to be fully integrated in local society.

Since the local newspaper is seen as a part of the local community and local identity, subscribers expect that the newspaper is on their side. For a local individual, to be criticized

in the local newspaper often feels much worse than facing the same or harsher criticism in the national tabloid papers. There is a dichotomy here, because the local public expects their local newspaper to be a watchdog even if they do themselves set quite strict limits for what is considered appropriate and acceptable criticism of existing values or systems.

The local newspaper has to be critical without being perceived as nasty or unfriendly. People see the local paper in my region as a part of their own identity. They have set expectations that the paper should be trustworthy and thorough, but it should not cry out loud. The local newspaper is their product, and they do themselves take responsibility for it. The fact that our readers do feel responsible for the paper and its content, is something quite unique.

(Informant D)

The informants all share the opinion that local newspapers are now much more occupied with news and investigative journalism compared to what they were a few decades ago. There is more acceptance for critical journalism, and readers do to some degree expect it, but it is still important to the readers that the local paper is perceived as being «on their side».

In a global village, individuals can more or less choose between an unlimited amount of proposals for identity and affiliation. In her book *Shopping for Identity - The Marketing of Ethnicity*, Marilyn Halter examines and describes how ethnic heritage is a growing trend in the United States of America (Halter, 2000). In a society often characterized as a melting pot, where people with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds meet, it has become a huge business to produce and sell goods and services that help people express their ethnic identities. Halter claims that there is a yearning for connection to our roots in all of us, and that modern society makes people search for roots and identity.

The mechanisms described in Halter's book may also be valid when examining the increased interest for local newspapers in Norway. As Norwegian society becomes increasingly modernized and globalized, there is an increasing yearn for roots and belonging in individuals. The ultra-local newspaper offers its readers a bond to the local community and an «ethnic» identity. Halter's reflections upon the increased demand for ethnicity are in line with the trend of tribalism as it is described by Patrick Dixon (Dixon, 2004). Globalization makes people look for roots, identity and tribal affiliation. People, from outside, can grow

roots in a local community. Subscribing to the local newspaper is beneficial in offering newcomers local knowledge that will aid them in «growing roots» in their new community.

The newspapers themselves are inclusive in the sense that any individual, who lives in the region or has bonds to the region, can have a share of the local if he or she pays the annual subscription-fee. The local editors also see it as a goal to reach newcomers and make a product that is appealing both to those who have strong roots in the region and to those who have recently moved in.

Informant D uses his knowledge from business administration when he refers to the role local newspapers have in producing a collective local identity. He has observed that people turn to the local newspapers in search for identity, recognition and security:

We give our readers and subscribers a confirmation of who they are, where they are, where they belong, and we give them information about those who live in the area. Theories of business management tell you that you must always have an idea of what you are producing. I do not think news is our principal product.

(Informant D)

The ultra local newspapers play an important role in producing and maintaining local identity, and the demand for local identity and affiliation has only grown stronger with globalization. Informant D is well aware that the product he sells to the public is much more than printed news. A local identity is not just a bi-product people get when they subscribe to the ultra-local paper, it is one of the aims. It is something unique that distinguishes these newspapers from their competitors, just like the ultra-local filter-function discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Filter – it is all about you

4.1 Never-ending stream of information

The last two decades there has been a technological revolution, giving us the World Wide Web, mobile telephones, video-technology, satellite- and cable television. New technology has accelerated globalization, and provided most Norwegians with simultaneous access to news from around the globe when they are in front of their computer, television or hold their mobile phone.

Parallel to the developments in communications, especially of electronic supraterritorial kind, a liberalization of the Norwegian television monopoly came in the late 1980s. VHS video and new television programmes brought American movies and TV-series like «Dallas» and «Dynasty» into families and homes all over the world (Askew and Wilk, 2002). It was frequently debated whether this was a sign of cultural imperialism and would lead to an Americanization of cultures due to the increased presence of «American» products like fast food, clothing labels, Hollywood films and TV-series and soft drinks. This not only happened in Norway but in countries all over the world.

In his book *Runaway World*, Anthony Giddens describes how a friend, who studied village life in central Africa in the 1990s, visited a remote area to carry out her fieldwork. The day she arrived, she was invited to a local home for entertainment, just to discover that the occasion was a viewing of the American movie *Basic Instinct* on video. This happened even before the film had reached the cinemas in London (Giddens, 2002:6).

The mass society theory stated that media text has a monolithic meaning for a passive audience. Mass media functioned like a «hypodermic needle», and it was assumed that individual beliefs and personalities were more or less helpless against the onslaught of mass culture. Later, especially due to the research of Elihu Katz, the passive-actor model of mass society theory was rejected. Through his research, Katz developed the limited effects paradigm (Liebes and Curran, 1998:23-41). He first demonstrated the importance of agency,

community and culture on the micro-interaction level, and later argued for similar relevance of these factors on macro-societal level. Today it is widely recognized that messages from media and mass communication are not passively received by the audience. In stead there is an understanding that individual interpretations are influenced by social environment and interpersonal relationships.

The perception of globalization as being equivalent with cultural imperialism and Americanization has also been altered since the 1980s. The great number of TV-channels and the vast amount of information accessible on the World Wide Web has given each media consumer the opportunity to pick and choose. There are not just Norwegian and American productions on our media-menu, because loads of information from all over the world is right there at our fingertips, on our screen or mobile. The information is accessible day and night, and people from Norway can find news about a suicide attack in Kabul or an earthquake in China just minutes after the tragedies have taken place. The news from other continents may in fact reach you faster than news from your own neighbourhood. In the globalized age time and space are not the barriers they once were.

Not only is there so much more information accessible, technology has also removed previous obstacles to public expression. Anyone with a computer and an internet connection can weblog on the Internet, create personal websites, participate in debates on the World Wide Web and use fora like Facebook and MySpace to express him- or herself. Clay Shirky claims that the result of this new technology is a mass amateurization of efforts previously reserved for media professionals (Shirky, 2008:55-80).

The question is why the ultra-local newspapers, win support in a market where people have free access to news and entertainment from all over the world 24 hours a day. Norwegian regional daily newspapers are struggling to keep their position and the national tabloids are facing a situation where more and more people read the news on the Internet for free instead of buying the paper. I will now move from the theoretical background material to look at how the local editors reflected upon this issue in my interviews.

4.2 Focus on the local

The ultra-local newspapers of my informants are exclusive in the sense that their local communities are the sole focus of attention. The editors hardly publish any national or international news unless there is a local link in somewhere. Local links can for instance be someone living in the local community who has his or her background from another place or country, a local person who has emigrated or a local company that is doing business abroad. This way of making global events into local news is called domestication. The newspaper is making big international events, which have a clear link to their community, available for their readers.

The local newspapers that I have studied did not fill their pages with general articles on the Israeli incursion in Gaza or the global financial crisis, international news that made top headlines in other media January 2009. When some of the ultra-local editors decided that there should be articles covering these international issues in their paper, they chose angles of approach that would show what impact these news have on their own local community and its members.

Informant D has collected several examples of domestication from ultra-local papers of news-articles. In his examples, local people are related to big events or catastrophes abroad in an almost periodic way. One example was an article from 1995 after the big earthquake in Kobe, Japan. The headline of the article stated: «2100 dead in Japan – 800 missing. The Stangeland family from Kvås are doing fine». Informant D smiled as he pointed at the paradox in the title, because it shows a small and ultra-local paper wanting to bring top international news. In his opinion, it would have been better if the headline focused only on the Norwegian family in Kobe. The tragedy in Japan would anyway be known to the readers through TV, radio and other media.

We are editing the world from what is relevant in our local context. Our papers can allocate faces, names and local connections to events that take place in other places. These articles complete the picture of what is happening out there. Still, one must not forget that these articles are a supplement to the international news people get from TV, radio and national papers.

(Informant D)

Editor G and Editor H made exceptions to their ultra-local policy in January 2009 when they both wrote and published general editorial comments on the Israeli military incursion in Gaza. The actions in Gaza were top news in radio, TV, national and international newspapers at the time. In these weeks several of the ultra-local papers also published interviews with local citizens that had immigrated from Palestine or Israel. In this way, they made the global news local.

I wrote an editorial comment on the Middle East on Friday the 9th. Sometimes you feel obliged to look a bit further than the tip of your own nose. Being self-absorbed and not caring about what is going on around us can make you feel a bit bad at times. I consider as local issues the topics that people discuss in our local society.

(Editor H)

The local editors are aware that more and more of their readers are operating on a global arena and take interest in international issues. This has to be balanced with the commitment to be ultra-local. Editor F's newspaper serves a community where a lot of international oil-companies have their Norwegian office. This affects the way she filters what is relevant and what is not for her newspaper.

The labour force in this community is international, and this represents a journalistic challenge because you cannot use the old definitions of local news when people work in Sudan and live here in Norway. I have to relate to the fact that my readers have the world as their arena. We are not yet in a position to say that we are a «glocal» paper, in the sense that we are able to write about the global issues that influence the lives of our local citizens.

(Editor F)

A regional newspaper, Stavanger Aftenblad, on the 29th of November 2008 published a commentary called «We now need the glocal newspapers»³ (Omdal, 2008). The commentary was written by the paper's editor of culture and multimedia, Svein Egil Omdal. He states that the small local newspapers should write more about global events and developments that have relevance for the lives of people in Norway and calls for the «glocal-journalists» who will travel around the world, not to find and write articles about local emigrants but to write

³ «Nå trenger vi glokalavisene» is the original headline of the article, which was written in Norwegian.

about the processes in the world that influence the situation of people in our own country and community.

There is another concept for that journalism we need to develop, a concept taken from the world of international marketing: «Glocalization». The separation walls between global and local are being torn down, we are all living glocally. The bus you take on your way to work is owned by a French, multinational company that is also building a railroad on Palestinian land. The workplace that you are going to, depends on a vote in OPEC or a decision that Barack Obama is to make in a month or two. The worth of your apartment in Alfaz del Pi can be drastically reduced if the financial crisis continues, or if the immigration from Africa to Southern Europe accelerates.

(Omdal, Stavanger Aftenblad, 2008)

Amongst my informants it was only Editor F who mentioned that she saw the glocal newspapers, as described by editor Svein Egil Omdal, as the goal. Other informants expressed the view that the local newspapers should first and foremost concentrate on the local society, giving people the local news that they cannot find elsewhere. Still, all editors were open to writing about international events or processes using domestication.

Editor C said that he is well aware that the ultra-local papers do not manage to give people a thorough understanding of global issues. He gave an example of the paper printing an interview with «the local hero», a Norwegian soldier who has returned from duty in Afghanistan, but not attempting to increase people's general understanding of the situation in Afghanistan. C was still critical to the regional newspaper's ability to give people an understanding of what global processes will mean for them in their local lives.

The regional paper, Stavanger Aftenblad, has stated that they want to show the global influences on the local. Yet they write isolated articles about the conflict in the Middle East or the war in Iraq. They do not manage to visualize the local consequences. They are best at demonstrating consequences when they are writing about the price of oil. The oil price is very important in this region, because so many people are employed in the oil industry. I don't think the big Norwegian media are by far good enough at showing local consequences of global processes, so how are the local media with less resources supposed to manage?

(Editor C)

Editor C is clear in his view that the ultra local newspaper should keep its main focus on the local issues and mirror the local community, claiming that the local newspaper speaks to local people and is concerned about their opinion and how they are doing while national papers speak more often with people in position of power and use normal people as «garnish».

The local newspapers try to get as close as possible to local society, and they try to cover both big and small events in their communities. At the bottom line there is a consensus amongst all the informants that the content of the newspaper has to be local. International news qualifies only to the extent that they can be domesticated or shown to have direct relevance in local society. Editor G is very confident on the advantages of this position: «Our pre is that we are alone with what we are presenting. You cannot get it elsewhere. You have to subscribe to the local paper if you want to know what is going on here».

4.3 Sorting out the noise

Editor G mentioned the fact that people today have so many choices when it comes to spending their free time. A few decades ago, there would be one channel on TV, most people would read one local or regional newspaper. Some would also read a national tabloid newspaper. In our modern media world, things are different:

Nowadays we have 100 channels on TV. And all the national papers and magazines - you can find everything on the Internet. It is important, especially to attract young readers, to have a presentation which gives easy access to the news. You do not need a university degree to read our paper, but on the other hand we do not want to be stupefying. Personally, I would rather see the paper being too complicated than stupefying. We want people to trust us and we want them to learn something.

(Editor G)

A female lawyer, informant L, had her own perspective on globalization and the overwhelming choice we have in TV-channels that provide us with news and entertainment. She expressed a paradox of the modern media-world by saying:

No matter what you choose to see on TV today, you can be certain that there is always someone in your lunch room who has watched another channel. In that way, by giving us all these channels, they have also have given us the freedom to choose watching nothing at all. I don't think they were aware of that.

(Informant L)

Informant L talked of the years before the late 1980s when there was just one TV-channel in Norway, the national broadcasting channel NRK. In those days all people watched NRK. The next day they would discuss what they had seen on TV in the lunch break at work, on the bus, at the dinner table, in school or when they met friends. This made watching NRK-TV almost compulsory for grown ups. Anyone who wanted to be active participants in the local or national debate should be familiar with the programmes on the national TV-channel.

The flow of culture and ideas through the mass media has been commonplace for a century. But the speed, the simultaneity and the increasing flow add up to something new. News and entertainment, fact and fiction, glamour and terror enter our homes in a never-ending stream. It can be hard for the media consumer to pick and choose, to sort fact from fiction and the important from the irrelevant. There is a lot of «noise» to be encountered for anyone who enters the World Wide Web or switches between several hundred TV-channels on the search for valuable information.

We give people local news, debate, information and we build identity. We provide people with a set of common references by writing about local issues. We also have the local advertisements that you cannot find elsewhere, and if you find them elsewhere they are hard to notice. There is more noise in other media. It is the same noise that the local newspapers compete with when it comes to news articles. On the ether media and internet - there is so much noise to be found. People want something solid, something they can identify with and recognize.

(Editor G)

The ultra local newspaper editors see it as their job to present stories that are important and interesting to local citizens. They have a filter that strictly sorts out all that does not have local content. The paper wants to give its readers information which is relevant, reliable and all ready filtered. Editor H sees it as his paper's job to write about «those things that happen right outside your door». Editor E did also use the door as a metaphor when expressing his view on local news and globalization:

The demand for local news will not decline. You can read about everything on the Internet, but there will still be need for the local paper. The world is at your doorstep if you want it there.

(Editor E)

The small and local newspapers are not crying out loud for attention. Sensations and big headlines do not so often figure in the local newspapers.

The local newspapers are good at also defining the normal as news. News is everything that has not happened before. In the tabloid newspapers that sell single copies, it is the abnormal that counts as news.

(Informant I)

Richard Kilborn has studied factual TV-programming and gives examples of how reality is faked or reconstructed to deceive the audience, and how so called reality-television and factual entertainment programmes have come to dominate TV-screens over the last decade (Kilborn, 2003). News stories and articles about the reality-TV programmes and their «celebrities» have also been devoted attention in newspapers, especially in the national tabloids.

In a commentary article, Jan Inge Sørbø uses Ari Behn, the husband of the Norwegian princess Märtha, as an example of what he calls fiction-factory in media. Behn, known as an author and a celebrity due to his royal connection and wide circle of high-profile friends, is frequently expressing himself in media and attracting national attention. This commentary article was written after Behn had criticized the writings of another famous Norwegian contemporary author in the national tabloid papers by saying that his books were equivalent with «pine wood furniture from IKEA».

Somewhere behind all this, there is a man and a family that we do not know anything about, and that we do not need to know anything about. What we need to know, is that «Ari Behn» is a fiction factory, and it works in the sense that Norwegian media takes care of most of the writing of this fiction. Media should, in my opinion, stop doing it. The one who is visible in media is «Ari Behn» and, as the quotation marks indicate, he does not exist. In the meantime, we have to relate to more definite realities, like the financial crisis and angels.

(Sørbø, Stavanger Aftenblad's Pluss, 2009)

My informants are clear in stating that their role is to present facts. Ari Behn is a non-topic in their local newspapers unless he decides to become a local citizen or visit their local area. Informant D posed a question that can be raised when the information stream is overwhelming and sometimes without filtering: «do we really need to know this?». At the same time he referred to the opinion held by some local citizens that: «if it has not been in the local paper, it has not happened». Implied in this there are two important premises: a belief in the editorial filter that sorts local from not local and vectorizes news that are factual and important for the local citizens, and the basic of building readers' trust in the local newspaper and its content.

Editor F thinks that globalization increases the demand for that which is «near and dear». Still she is aware that globalization and new information technology represents a challenge to the strong position of the printed local newspaper.

When people turn on their television and get news from the Middle East all the time, then they appreciate reading the local newspaper to find out what our church ministers think of homosexual marriage. But we face a challenge, because people are interested in South American alpaca wool and buy their dog from Sweden. We do not live in a vacuum, although we try to make our readers believe that... Selecting bits and pieces from the whole world on the Internet does not place us in a context. Our newspaper does. It gives you a sense of belonging, something that is fundamental.

(Editor F)

According to Assistant Professor Kevin Howley from the Department of Communication and Theatre at DePauw University, the growing popular interest in community media across the globe indicates a profound dissatisfaction with media industries preoccupied with increasing market shares and profitability at the expense of public accountability and social value (Howley, 2005:33). Community media also manifests a desire to reassert local autonomy and defend particularistic identities in the wake of transnational media flows and attendant homogenization of cultural forms. In his book *Community Media – People, Places, and Communication Technologies*, Howley defines community media as grassroots or locally oriented media access initiatives predicated on a profound sense of dissatisfaction with mainstream media form and content (Howley, 2005:2).

The Norwegian local newspapers in my study may not have been founded due to dissatisfaction with mainstream media, but they share the other characteristics that Howley mentions when he refers to community media: they are dedicated to the principles of free expression and participatory democracy, and committed to enhancing community relations and promoting community solidarity.

Informant B points to the fact that the Norwegian ultra-local newspapers may also be important for the wellbeing of their readers. The massive amount of news from distant places about wars, catastrophes and crises may bring upon people a need for rest and a mental «comfort zone».

When people have had their daily dose of world problems, they appreciate taking a break by reading their local printed newspaper. People need breathing space, and the local newspaper provides them with that. They also need familiarity, which the local newspaper also gives them.

(Informant B)

The fact that the pages of the local newspapers are free from world problems, is by informant I seen as a challenge. He thinks there could in future develop a pressure upon the local papers to write about global issues as the world comes closer to people's daily lives. However he is clear that it is at present impossible for local newspapers to deal with global issues, due to their limited resources.

Especially from young readers we face criticism for not giving a damn about the world. The world is about to go under, with the financial crisis and all, but the local newspaper pretends that nothing is happening. If the Chinese ruin the ozone layer, we will also suffer. Our young readers request more international content, but the established readers are more concerned with school and local issues.

(Informant I)

4.4 This is relevant for you

Kevin Howley describes community media as responses to the felt need of local populations to create media systems that are relevant to their everyday lives (Howley, 2005:3). Strategic to these efforts are purposeful assertions of collective identity and local autonomy. The

editors that have participated in this study do see collective identity and local autonomy as important for their local newspapers' success. It could very well be that globalization and internationalization increases people's need for community media and ultra-local newspapers that are relevant to their daily lives.

The local editors feel challenged knowing that their readers live on a global scale, but still insist that it is the purely local focus that will win them readers in the years to come. The local newspapers have as their goal to bring news that is relevant in a local context. The editorial filter eliminates «noise» from the endless stream of information encountered on TV, Internet and other media and creates a product that is custom fit for local readers.

Domestication, making news local by finding a local link, is at present the way in which these ultra-local newspapers deal with global issues and actions that take place outside their local community.

The exclusiveness of the community media is seen as one advantage for the local newspapers. The editorial filtering of news ensures that the readers get information that they can make use of in their daily lives. Informant K has previously worked as a journalist and editor of a local newspaper and is at present member of the Norwegian Parliament. He points to the total package that people get when they subscribe to the local paper.

Nowhere else can you get the total amount of what you get in your local newspaper in such an easy, inexpensive and convenient way. The local newspaper is the sum of what you are waiting for and what you didn't know that you would get. Other people have sorted things for you and made a heap of what they from experience think is important for you to be a part of and updated on your local community. You get so much, so close, so cheap and with so little time spent.

(Informant K)

The ultra-local newspapers do only publish one, two or three days a week and are therefore not as time consuming as big, daily newspapers, television or internet that give news around the clock.

The editorial filter eliminates all news that is not local, but at the same time accepts news stories from daily life that would not qualify as content in other media. This could for instance be stories of schoolchildren who collect money for charity or someone in the neighbourhood who has grown a beautiful garden. Normal people and what they are occupied with is considered relevant in the ultra-local papers, and so is investigative journalism on issues that will be important for their community.

The fact that the ultra-local newspapers are usually free from news on international conflicts, wars and catastrophes may also add to their appeal. As informant B puts it, the local newspapers give people «breathing space» and a feeling of comfort. The global financial crisis or environmental crisis does not make the headlines in the ultra-local papers unless there is a local approach. If there is a local approach the story is likely to be less sensational and dramatic than if it were to be presented in other media. When the global stream of information is too overwhelming, the local newspaper can be a comfort zone. Editor H sums it up like this:

When you have the whole world entering your living room through television and Internet, it can be convenient to grab your local paper. People need the local, but they do not necessarily feel that they need to know what is going on in the rest of the world.

(Editor H)

The ultra-local editorial filter gives the readers' predictability, in the sense that they know that their newspaper will give them information from their local community only. They are well aware that they have to search elsewhere for information about celebrities, national politics and global events. The local newspaper is «near and dear» and tells its readers what they need to know in order to navigate successfully in their local environment.

So far we have discussed filter, identity and ritual as possible reasons for the growing interest for ultra-local media. The last concept to be discussed in this thesis is empowerment. In a world where more and more decisions are taken in places far away from you and me, can the local newspapers possibly play a role in empowering local citizens?

Chapter 5: Empowerment - you have influence

5.1 No mission impossible

In a fast global media reality each individual may feel small and unimportant. People are bombarded with news, and much of it is rather depressing. Schirato and Webb discuss how mass media can on the one hand humanize and personalize events and on the other hand naturalize other parts of the world as places where disasters happen, where corruption and violence are endemic, where «life is cheap» and people behave in an erratic and irrational manner (Schirato and Webb, 2003:170-171). This makes it easier for audiences to distance themselves from the events or ignore what is happening.

Anne Thurmann-Nielsen discusses the tragic paradox that international and national media seems to have room for just one international catastrophe at the time in her commentary article «One war at the time» («En krig om gangen») in the national tabloid paper *Dagbladet* (Dagbladet, 2009). She points to the fact that civilians in Congo were still being killed and raped while all media attention was focused on the Israeli incursion in Gaza:

...it is in fact of great importance that the world gets to see the bloody day to day life of civilians when the rawness of war is on the loose. It is so gruesome that most people cannot stand more of it. That is what happened when the news of the massacre in Northeast Congo occurred at Christmastime, about the same time as the Israelis started their attacks on Gaza. Maybe it is a good sign that there are limits to what we can take of war and catastrophes. One war at a time gets us involved. All the wars and catastrophes in the world just turn us apathic.

(Thurmann-Nielsen, *Dagbladet* 2009)

The local editors have set it as their goal to present news that has relevance to citizens in their communities. While it may seem impossible for individuals to influence the developments or events in other places of the world, the local newspaper provides people with information they can act upon in their immediate context. It is no «mission impossible» for individuals to influence their local society. The editor-informants in this study seek to empower their readers through writing about issues that can engage and encourage a local debate.

In 2004 I had the pleasure of participating in a course for local journalists at UPDATE, the Danish national centre for building journalistic competence and knowledge. The teachers at the seminar, Marianne Hansen and Peter From Jacobsen, encouraged the participating journalists to ask themselves three initial questions before writing an article. The questions were: What do I want to tell the reader? Why should the reader know this? What should the reader act upon once knowing this?

Using the Norwegian ultra-local newspapers as examples, writing an article about an upcoming church-concert gives the reader the option to choose between going and not going to the event. An article about drug-consumption amongst young teenagers may inform the readers of the signs of drug-abuse, on the extension of the problem and how parents should react when suspecting that their children are experimenting with drugs. The ultra-local newspapers seek to provide citizens with the information they need to navigate successfully in their local environment and to make a difference.

It is also without doubt that the readers have more power to influence the content of their ultra-local newspaper compared to other media. The local newspaper exists within the community and is part of the community, as I have discussed earlier in this paper. The paper is dependant on its readers and their satisfaction. The smaller the community is, the more important every subscriber will be, and the more influence he or she is likely to have on the paper's content. My informant who is a member of the Norwegian Parliament, informant K, warned against the local papers being arrogant towards readers and informants when being asked what he saw as potential threats to the local newspapers. He stressed the importance of respect towards the readers and keeping a low threshold for contact between paper and people.

5.2 Power to the people

Editor F was especially concerned with the newspapers' role in providing citizens with information that empower them. She exemplified by saying that her newspaper makes the

world a bit smaller, and that people have the chance to influence their local community through the local newspaper.

The local newspaper is important for people to be involved in society, care about their community and influence local decisions. You get the feeling that you are part of a community, and you need news to be able to function in that community.

(Editor F)

Editor C contrasts global events that local citizens have little influence on with local issues that his paper writes about. The local newspaper tells people what their neighbour has been up to or what is happening in their part of town.

Identity and recognition and the opportunity to influence. There is so little we can do about the war in Gaza, but in a new residential area in our city there is a need for sports facilities and a community centre. They have a football-field, but no wardrobes or places for social gatherings. 26 windows have been destroyed at the local school by youngsters who are bored to death. That is a problem we are able to solve. We are not talking billions for a peace-treaty, but a few dozen millions for a community center.

(Editor C)

C points to the fact that the local newspaper follows up close both the big and small events in the local society. The national papers often enter the scene when things have become «too bad», when the situation is out of control. The youth-problems in the new residential area are not yet extensive enough to catch national interest. Some years ago another suburb in the same town was portrayed in national media as an area with criminal youth and social problems. By focusing on the needs in this suburb, Editor C and his paper hope to influence citizens and local politicians to act before the problems grow bigger.

Editor F lists critical articles and investigative journalism as the main tool for empowering her readers. She has twice represented the ultra-local media at the Norwegian conference for investigative journalism, SKUP, and participated in debates to argue for more critical local journalism.

In 2003 when I took over as an editor here, we decided that we would write about local issues before they were voted upon in the local council. This faced us with negative reactions from the local politicians, because they were not anymore allowed to make their decisions in peace and quiet. From being a referring organ, we changed into being an opinion-forming organ. After just a few months, the opposition parties understood that they could use this to their advantage.

(Editor F)

F has as her goal to empower local citizens. This is done by writing in advance about issues and decisions that are to be made, so that there will be time for local debate and lobbying. F sums it up like this:

We provide people with an opportunity to make a difference, and a lot of people have made their voice heard through our paper. Many are surprised to realize the impact they can make through the local paper.

(Editor F)

Other informants also mention the importance of the ultra-local newspapers when it comes to empowering individuals. Creating debate and discussion is mentioned by all the editors as something the local newspapers should do.

The local newspaper has an important function in setting an agenda for public debate and discussion. Without local newspapers there is a chance we would have missed the local debate that is so important in smaller communities.

(Editor H)

None of my informants emphasized any special groups in their local society when talking of how the local paper empowers people. This could be because they consider it valid for all subscribers. Still it is possible to empower specific groups, like children, women or elders, through focused articles. Children and senior citizens may also feel more at ease with approaching the ultra-local newspaper than other media, since the ultra-local paper is considered part of the local community and is known for accepting both small and big local events to qualify as content.

Editor C hints to this when he talks of how the local newspaper speaks with «normal people in the street». The role of the local newspaper as an arena where local organizations can tell

the public about their activities also give women's organizations, Christian organizations and senior citizen organizations room to voice their opinions.

Editor E mentions that people want to know what their children are doing in school and in the kindergarten. The local newspaper takes a closer look at the local society, including the lives of children and youth. In several of the communities served by the papers of my informants, there are special youth councils or children and youth councils where political decisions on issues that concern young citizens are taken. Some of the local newspapers often follow these meetings and in that sense empower the young «local politicians» by taking them seriously. Research shows that while the more and more young people turn to the Internet for information, most of them still prefer to read their local newspaper on paper (Dagens Medier, 2008). When people were asked in which media they were most likely to participate in a public discussion or debate, the local newspapers scored higher than the regional and national newspapers in all groups, even though the Internet was listed first amongst the youngest respondent (Vox Publica, 2008).

5.3 Democracy

In the local newspaper *Agder Flekkefjords Tidende*, Knut Sand Bakken who is a minister in a church in Oslo and originally from the town Flekkefjord, wrote a commentary article on the local newspaper's function in suggesting issues for local debate and discussion (Agder Flekkefjords Tidende, 2008). The headline of Sand Bakken's article raises the question whether the newspaper should point at issues for political debate. In the article, Sand Bakken underlines the importance of collective knowledge and common discussions for local democracy.

The value of *Agder* is not just its information. An important part of the paper's value is also the awareness that other people, for instance colleagues at work, are obtaining the same information, so that we will have topics for discussion in our lunch-break. This does not always happen, because we have sometime acquired different information. It is important for our society that we can have collective discussions, and that we (at least to some degree) know what we are talking about. That is not to be taken for granted with our contemporary stream of information.

A third challenge is to create a debate that makes it possible to make the right decisions. In defence of the individual and the hunt for human real-life stories, the public debate can often end up off track.

(Sand Bakken in Agder Flekkefjords Tidende, 2008)

Informant J uses a sociological approach when looking at the role of the ultra local newspapers in local democracy. He says that is only through the common arenas that people can have influence in the local democracy, and the ultra local newspaper is one such arena.

A lot of previous arenas where people met and discussed local issues have disappeared in our modern world. According to Informant J these were arenas of collective self reflection. Nowadays, a lot of grocery shops in smaller communities have been replaced by big shopping malls in the city. Ferries to local islands, where people used to meet and have a chat, are now replaced by tunnels and bridges that people drive through in their cars. At the same time, in our modern world more women working outside the home. This means that women are now more active in the public discussions, for instance in the lunch breaks at work, and more active in local democracy. It might be this is also the reason why local papers are becoming more important, because when people have less possibilities to interact on arenas in the local neighbourhood, their awareness of what is happening in their community is reduced. The ultra-local paper can fill this void.

Local media contribute to the public society where opinions are created and discussed. But local media can also create a society where opinions are just stated and not put up for debate. We get more value out of local information if we have additional arenas for testing out our opinions and standpoints. Then we learn how to go about with things.

(Informant J)

Editor F calls building democracy «the large project» of the newspaper. By subscribing to the local newspaper, people get the opportunity to participate in local democracy. The newspaper gives people the feeling that they can influence local decisions. In that way, F sees that her paper is strengthening local democracy.

In the book *Lokalavisa nær og kjær*, published to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the organization LLA, Gard Espeland has a chapter on the role of the local newspapers as a forum for debate (Espeland, 2006:22-23). He writes that a public debate where all views are presented and tested out is a condition for democracy. It was often claimed that this debate took place because there were several newspaper with different political standpoints in a town. In our modern days, this is not the situation in smaller communities and towns. Instead small communities and towns have just one local newspaper, and most of them are independent of political parties. They opt to create debate both through letters from their readers and through articles and interviews with people who voice different opinions. According to Espeland, keeping the local debate going is one of the most important tasks of the local newspaper. He continues to say that the participation in local election will depend on how successful the paper is in keeping the debate alive.

The Norwegian National Association of Local Newspapers, LLA, carried out a special project in 2007 with the aim to increase the participation in the local election in September that year. By arranging courses for journalists and encouraging the newspapers to write about local political issues and candidates for the upcoming elections, LLA hoped to prove that the local newspapers' coverage of could have a direct effect on the number of people who participated by giving their vote in the election. After the elections it was found that participation in the election had in average increased by 3 percent on a national level, from 58 to 61, compared to the previous local election in Norway in 2003. In those 160 communities served by local newspapers that were members of the LLA, the participation had also gone up by around 3 percent, from 61 to 64 percent.

Even though the LLA project in 2007 did not result in a higher rise in election participation in their 160 communities compared to the national average, it is believed that the ultra-local papers are important to create interest in local democracy. A survey, carried out by the Norwegian Media Businesses' Association in autumn 2007, showed that 95 percent of the local politicians considered that the local and regional newspapers were very important or quite important for creating interest for the local election. The results also showed that the local and regional papers were the most important sources of information for the public who wants to obtain knowledge about parties and issues in the election campaign. The politicians

also considered these newspapers their most important channel for targeting the voters with their message (Dagens Medier, No 1, 2008).

General secretary Rune Hetland of the LLA is convinced that the local newspapers' thorough coverage of the local campaign and focus on important local issues is one of the main reasons for the increase in voters' participation in the 2007 election. He was satisfied with the three percent increase in election participation. Now LLA are working on a new project which aims to encourage more young people to become «active citizens». The goal is to increase youth participation in local society and elections (LLA, 2009) (Lokalavisa, Utgåve 2, 2007).

In the book *Making the local news*, Bob Franklin and Jon Parry have studied British newspaper coverage of the 1997 general elections in the United Kingdom (Franklin and Murphy, 1998:209-227). Their conclusion is that party campaigning strategies made the election less relevant or perhaps more unpalatable to local readership because it focused on leaders rather than politics, something that led to few genuine local stories. Still, they found that local press coverage of the election compared favourably with national reporting, because it offered voters detailed accounts of the local political contest to inform their electoral choice and provided a forum in which local voices and opinions could join the political debate.

Professor of Religion at Princeton University Cornel West stresses the importance of a free and frank press in his book *Democracy matters-Winning the fight against imperialism* (West, 2004:25-62). His argument is that ambitious and too often docile and deferential newspeoples' occupation with a market bottom line has contributed to a widespread public apathy about US politics. West writes that too much of what passes for news today is really a form of entertainment. He claims that there can be no democratic critical cultivation of an active citizenry without a bold and courageous press willing to speak against the elites. When a market-dominated mentality prevails over democratic principle, he argues, imperialism reigns supreme. West further talks of a pervasive nihilism in American democracy, much due to the lack of autonomy of «the so called free press» to inspire democratic energies.

In a commentary article on the debate pages of the regional newspaper *Stavanger Aftenblad*, journalist Kjell Gjerset deals with what he calls the death of the free press in a world where media has become an industry and the owners of the press are more concerned with economy than with the important role of the press in defending freedom of speech (Stavanger Aftenblad, 2009). Gjerset refers to recent reductions in journalistic staff at *Stavanger Aftenblad* due to the financial crisis in 2009 as an example of how the importance of «the free word» is weakened due to a market-dominated mentality. Gjerset's arguments are much similar to what Cornel West talks about in his book where he warns against national apathy.

The transformation of the press to a media-industry has weakened the significance of the free word. One can find it difficult to take the newspapers seriously and find them engaging when they just go on about downsizing, uncertainty and become unclear.

When there is a crisis, and a real need for a hard hitting critical press, the media cuts down on their budgets and gets rid of employees, almost like a stockbroker company or a car factory.

(Gjerset, Stavanger Aftenblad, 2009)

The editors and other informants that have been interviewed in this study underline the importance of the local newspapers for democracy and empowerment of individuals at community level in Norway. It can always be discussed if the Norwegian local newspapers are the prototypes of free and frank press or if they are also to a large extent influenced by what Cornel West calls market-dominated mentality. While most of them originated out of local idealism or communities wanting their own information bulletin, in recent years ownership has become more professional and centralized. The newspapers of editors C, E, F, G and H are all wholly or partially owned by informant D and his company. However this still represents local ownership in the sense that D is himself from the region and has previously been editor in one of the papers.

The ultra-local newspapers are community media, and alternative media, in the sense that they have a different profile and approach from the national and international press. Their sole focus is on the local community and its citizens. The editors express a wish to serve and strengthen local democracy. Kjell Gjerset indirectly supports their determination by referring to the fact that local ownership and a common goal is important:

It could be that the owners do not influence the content of the newspaper, but it is obvious that they influence the identity in the newsroom.

Journalists are individualists, but they are all dependant upon the «we-feeling»: Belonging to a newsroom that has a goal. Living and working with a bunch of enthusiastic geniuses who know what they are working for.

(Gjerset,Stavanger Aftenblad, 2009)

5.4 A remedy against apathy

When asked of what he thought was the most important reason why people request local news, even though their daily life is increasingly influenced by global events and decisions, informant I pointed to the fact that local knowledge is needed if you are going to understand and function in a local society. He continued by emphasizing the role of the local newspaper as a meeting ground for local citizens:

More than ever before it is important to be an arena where different views can be expressed and readers can be challenged. There are not other arenas. The age of the community meetings is over, and the meeting places in local communities are fewer or non existent. The local newspaper is the meeting place. Therefore the paper has a huge responsibility for the direction in which society develops. If the paper starts a debate, it will influence the outcome of the matter.

(Informant I)

Community media and the ultra-local newspapers confirm the ability of local populations to use the instruments of mass communication. Even more important, community media encourages political participation and civic engagement in the life of local communities by recognizing and affirming local populations as citizens (Howley, 2005:268-269). By creating a local debate, setting a local agenda and promoting increased participation in the local election, the local newspapers work to empower individuals in their own community.

The goal is to create active citizens who participate in public life, through the public debate in the newspaper, discussions in work and private and through participation in local democracy. Active citizens are linked to globalization in two ways. One can see active citizenship as an effect of and response to globalization. The globalization of economic markets is seen as a challenge to democracy because it undermines the authority and influence of nation-states

and established ways of defining citizenship. Encouraging active citizenship is a way to regenerate civic culture, and revitalization of civic culture is a response to the democratic threat posed by globalization (Mooney and Evans, 2007:3).

In *Globalization – a critical introduction*, Jan Aart Scholte points to how intensified global relations have often weakened intimacy and mutual support within neighbourhoods as well as within countries. He illustrates this by saying that people who are glued to television and computer screens may have virtual bonds across the planet but little or no acquaintance with persons living next door (Scholte, 2005:309). The editors believe that the local press can provide people with a sense of community and promote social cohesion and active citizenship on a local level. Scholte, however, warns against romanticizing the local and promoting communitarism where the «in-group» is constructed through an emphasis of difference from and opposition to an «out-group». Such communitarism is similar to the ethnocentrism that Jaakko Lehtonen describes in his article «Globalization, National Cultures and the Paradox of Intercultural Competence» (Lehtonen, 2003:144). He defines being ethnocentric as feeling that your way is the best way, being aware of the differences between your own and other cultures and classifying people into two groups: us and them.

The ultra-local newspapers are clearly creating an «in-group», in the sense that their audience is people living in the local community and people who have affiliations with the local community. On the other hand, the local newspapers are inclusive in the sense that everyone within the local community belongs to the «in-group». Informant G was very aware that he did not want his newspaper to nourish local self-aggrandizement or ethnocentrism:

We aim to strengthen local identity, but it must not tip over to us making readers' believe that we are better than other regions and nations.

(Informant G)

The ultra-local newspapers have as their goal to strengthen social cohesion and promote active citizenship on community level. In that way, they work to combat the trend of public apathy that Cornel West warns of. By giving citizens an opportunity to voice their opinion and take part in public debate on local issues, the local newspapers aim to promote local

democracy. When global conflicts and catastrophes in national and international media may make individuals feel small and weak, the local press sets an agenda with challenges and problems that can be solved through community initiative.

Globalization poses a threat to local democracy, and to the ultra-local newspapers, when decisions that directly affect small communities in Norway are taken in far-away places. The «glocal journalism» of Svein Egil Omdal aims to represent a new form of local journalism that will link local to global, informing citizens of how global events and issues influence their daily lives.

The informants in this study do believe that there is a place for the ultra-local newspapers in future. People will request information about their immediate physical surroundings, their neighbours and their childrens' schools, even if their lives are increasingly influenced by global decisions. When more and more decisions that affect our daily lives are taken in far away places, local knowledge and the ability to influence local development becomes increasingly important. The ultra-local newspapers provide people with both.

In the proceeding chapter, the findings from chapter 1 up to 5 are summed up and discussed. I will also demonstrate how these findings open up for a new theoretical perspective and understanding.

Chapter 6: Concluding remarks – You on solid ground

6.1 More local and more global

In the first chapter of this thesis, I showed that there was a growing interest for the local parallel with the accelerating globalization. By referring to opinion polls, literature, subscription figures and the establishment of ultra-local newspapers and websites in Norway and abroad, I presented evidence that the interest for ultra-local news is increasing in our «global village». In chapters, 2, 3, 4 and 5, I have introduced and discussed the concepts of rituals, identity, filter and empowerment by combining theoretical material from literature with the data obtained from my fieldwork. It is now time to look at what rituals, identity, filter and empowerment have in common. Towards the end of this chapter, I will introduce a new theoretical perspective that my findings lead up to.

Patrick Dixon is often described by the media as Europe's leading Futurist. He has been ranked as one of the world's 50 most influential business thinkers today by Bloomsbury Publishing/Suntop Media global executive survey (Dixon, 2004). Dixon predicts a reaction against the speed and constant change of globalization in his book *Futurewise – six faces of global change*, and he thinks that this will give added value to things that are unchanging and therefore by definition old (Dixon, 2004:234).

There is a fundamental human need for security, for some things at the root of our being that do not change. Most humans can not cope with complete and continuous changes in all areas of their lives without becoming at risk of emotional disorder and inefficiency, as more and more resources are mopped up coping with everyday life.

(Dixon, 2004: 235)

Dixon's predictions can be used to explain the increased interest for ultra-local news. He refers to the added value of things that are unchanging. This corresponds well with my findings in chapter 2 on rituals and in chapter 3 on identity and tradition. Informant D is former editor of a local newspaper, owner of several ultra-local newspapers, chairman of the

board of the *Mediebedriftenes Landsforening* (Norwegian Media Businesses' Association) and Vice President of the European Newspaper Publishers' Association. This statement demonstrates that he is well aware of the trend of increased value of and respect for his business idea, the ultra-local newspaper:

The local press has suddenly become very modern, even if we are actually doing exactly the same now as we have always done.

(Informant D)

Some of the local newspapers have a long history, and they have often been criticized for being old fashioned, too traditional and even «a granny paper», as Informant I put it. Now globalization and a rapid changing world has made traditional, old and predictable into words of honour which is giving added value to the local papers.

The revival of local identity and local empowerment, concepts I have discussed in chapter 3 and 5, are mentioned by Director of the London School of Economics, Anthony Giddens, as direct consequences of globalization. He talks of how globalization has an opposite effect to «pulling away» power or influence from local communities and nations into the global arena.

And indeed this is one of its consequences. Nations do lose some of the economic power they once had. Yet it also has an opposite effect. Globalisation not only pulls upwards, but also pushes downwards, creating new pressures for local autonomy. The American sociologist Daniel Bell describes this very well when he says that the nation becomes not only too small to solve the big problems, but also too large to solve the small ones.

Globalisation is the reason for the revival of local cultural identities in different parts of the world.

(Giddens, 2002:13)

6.2 Near and dear

The book that was published to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the National Association of Local Newspapers (LLA) was named *Nær og kjær*, which could be translated into «near and

dear» in English. On page 97 author Gard Espeland discusses the future and the challenges, globalization and urbanization, for the local newspapers, and the pressure these trends put on local communities. Despite the fact that people are now more than ever before exposed to global influences, he finds reasons to believe that people's interest for what is «near and dear» will increase.

But maybe this pressure is exactly the reason why there are forces that draw in the opposite direction. When a local community feels in threat, bonds are formed and interest for local culture increases. This can for instance be seen in the many cultural events and the many books on local history that prevail in Norwegian rural communities. In this picture, the local newspaper has an important function which can become even more important in future if the pressure from outside grows stronger. The local newspaper gives the local community its identity, first and foremost by mirroring the local society and adding value to it. A veteran-car enthusiast or a local rock talent will enjoy their activities. But their joy is enlarged when the local newspaper writes about their hobbies. In that sense, it can be said that the papers give some sort of social approval to such activities.

(Espeland, 2006:97)

I have in chapter 2 explained how the ritual functions of the ultra-local newspapers act to create and reinforce a sense of community. Again using Dayan and Katz' terminology, the local newspaper legitimizes the activities of the local veteran car club and young aspiring rock stars. It could very well be that there are bigger veteran car collections or better rock bands to be found elsewhere in the country or the world, but the local newspaper presents to its readers the activities that are near and easily accessible. The social legitimization that the paper provides by writing about local clubs, local democracy or local events, give these activities a stamp of approval. These are «safe» activities – near and dear.

The often ritualized activity of picking up the ultra-local newspaper in the mailbox once, twice or three times a week at a special time of day and then reading its contents, often enjoying it together with a cup of coffee or tea, can provide individuals with a feeling of security. This ritual-like activity is something consistent in the subscribers' everyday lives, in a world where there are continuous rapid changes that have to be dealt with. In addition, the local newspaper contains vital information that people can make use of when they move outside of their homes and act as citizens in the local community.

Espeland talks of how the local newspaper gives an identity to the community, it serves something. The local newspaper strengthens and creates local identity, as I have demonstrated in chapter 3. Modernity and globalization give people the opportunity to choose between a variety of different identities, and this can be seen both as a possibility and a threat.

Informant A is a researcher of media science who points to local identity and local patriotism as the ideal motivation for future success for the ultra-local papers. The local newspaper builds local identity, and people want to know what is going on in their neighbourhood. It is also a strength that the ultra-local newspapers consider all citizens of the local community their target-group. In this way, the local paper works to create an inclusive society and social coherence.

There is no doubt that it is the small newspapers that have really grown in numbers since 1990. The small newspapers are also performing best when it comes to attracting the attention of young people and young adults, who are considered the most problematic group of readers to reach. When people are asked what they want from their newspaper, they answer local articles, articles that are as local and near as possible. The little local newspaper that covers what is near and dear gives them that.

(Informant A)

Several of my informants talked of how important it was for them and for their subscribers to read articles about normal people, their neighbours and kids. It is only through the ultra-local newspapers that parents can be informed of what projects or activities their children are working on in school, or what plans their neighbours have for building a new garage in their garden. Insecurity about local issues and problems in the near neighbourhood may in fact cause greater worries than world catastrophes and tragedies in far-away places. Editor C puts it in his own words:

We write about people's daily lives, and about things that influence their daily lives more than the financial crisis, the war in Gaza or the tsunami.

(Editor C)

6.3 What you see is what you get

Chapter 4 dealt with the filter in ultra-local newspapers, and the obvious fact that you do not reach for the ultra-local newspaper if you want to learn more about the fight against terror in Afghanistan or climate changes in the Arctic. The ultra-local newspapers have a clear policy that their one and only focus is the local community. In that sense, people know what they get when they subscribe to an ultra-local paper. It is predictable, because of the editorial filter that lets only local stories pass through. This corresponds with Dixon's theory of globalization giving added value to things that are unchanging and predictable. The ultra-local newspapers are set to compliment national and international news from regional and national press, television, radio and internet, and we are now experiencing a shift in interest from national to local level.

While the smallest newspapers have cultivated and strengthened their ultra-local profile, the regional newspapers are attempting to give readers an overview on local, national and international news. In those regions of Norway where there is rapid population growth, and in a world where the stream of information is endless and most international news easily accessible on radio, TV and internet, the regional newspapers often struggle to meet the expectations of their readers. Some readers expect local news and find that there is too little of that in the regional paper, while others would have preferred more international news and political commentaries. The regional newspapers aim to give their readers everything, something which is increasingly difficult in our complex global reality.

Editor H reflects upon how the ultra-local newspapers have strengthened their position because of their continuous presence in the local community and people's demand for information on what is going on in their neighbourhood.

Our paper is solid, good and simple – and the near things have become more important to people. There is an alienation in society that the local newspapers can benefit from. The regional newspapers do not reach out in the local community in the same way that we do. They have fewer articles from the rural areas and communities and more focus on the city where they are located.

(Editor H)

The small and local newspapers do not count on loud and sensational headlines to attract attention. Stories about yearly ritual events and normal people's everyday activities do figure in the local papers, but only when they take place in or have a link to the local community. The local subscription newspapers try to portray local society as it is, not by emphasizing what is extraordinary or odd. This distinguishes them from the national tabloid newspapers where sensation and big headlines is the recipe to sell copies.

Presenting local society as it is, writing about children's activities in kindergarten, local football teams, bringing advertisements for shops in the neighbourhood and critical articles on issues that are to be discussed in the local council, the ultra-local newspapers confirm that some things are consistent in a constantly changing world. In legitimizing and vectorizing local events and local democracy, the ultra-local press strengthens local institutions. Anthony Giddens claims that globalization pushes downwards, creating new pressures for local autonomy and interest in local identity (Giddens, 2002), and this creates a demand for ultra-local news. By informing citizens of issues that are at stake in local democracy, the ultra-local papers seek to empower individuals and groups. The ideal place to run a local newspaper is a local community where there is active citizenship, a strong local identity and social coherence.

It is in the very nature of the ultra-local newspapers to reassure readers that the local community exists and will continue to exist, even when crisis or catastrophe has happened. The local community will continue its life and the local newspaper will, and they are both dependant on the other.

6.4 A safe place called home

In this time of globalization, ritual, identity, filtering and empowerment are more and more becoming the strength of the ultra-local newspapers. If ultra-local newspapers would ignore rituals and identity, they would place themselves outside of their community where they have the consumers of their product. Because they do take it into account, they embed in the community. Filtering and empowerment adds value to the community and strengthens the

papers position as part of it even more. The ultra-local newspaper becomes something safe and stable for people who live in a complicated and rapidly changing world. This leads to a new theoretical perspective that overarches the findings in my thesis: Providing individuals with tools for reflexivity and guide for successful navigation in the local environment, the ultra-local newspapers offer a sense of increased security to people in a global and changing reality. It can be argued that an increased sense of human insecurity, due to globalization, works to promote interest for the ultra-local.

The ultra-local newspapers present to their readers a local reality that is not dominated by the global threats, wars, scares, crises and emergencies. Neither do these newspapers fill their pages with gossip that serves to promote reality-TV series or «fiction factories» like Ari Behn, stories that can be seen as noise in the never-ending stream of more relevant and important information.

In his book *Globalization – a critical introduction* Jan Aart Scholte has dedicated a separate chapter to the topic of Globalization and (In)Security (Scholte, 2005:279-315). Scholte discusses how globalization has had important repercussions for various facets of human security, for instance military, ecological, economical, psychological and cultural. His opinion is that the negative impacts on security have generally not resulted from the growth of transplanetary connectivity as such, but from the policies, often along neoliberalist lines, that have been adopted toward the trend.

AIDS, GM, CFCs, LTCM, ICBMs, SARS, 9/11, Y2K. Much of the shorthand of today's more global world resonates of insecurity. Contemporary public discourse, particularly through the mass media, is replete with threats, scares, crises and emergencies. Some sociologists have in this light described the present circumstances as a «risk society», and «human security» has become a popular buzzword.

(Scholte, 2005: 279)

It could prove to be true that globalization is a factor that makes the Norwegian ultra-local newspapers more attractive than ever before. Several of the informants that have been interviewed in this study are convinced of that. Informant D thinks that local identity and ties to the local community will become more and more important to people as the world becomes more fragmented and without limits. Even on the personal level, as an owner of

several newspapers and member of an international organization of media owners, he sees the advantage of having close local ties while at the same time being open to global influences.

I am very aware of where I come from. That makes you more prone to be open to other influences. I am internationally oriented, I speak a few languages and I am often surprised to see all the similarities there are between different people and countries. In addition, there is no way we can ignore globalization. Strategically and when it concerns business, one has to be open to impulses from the rest of Europe and the world.

(Informant D)

Informant I spoke of how the ultra-local newspaper provides people with a sense of security:

The most important things in people's lives are security in the place where they live and sleep, and security for their children and what is near and dear. As we travel more, it will become increasingly important to have a secure base and to have control in the base. In my home community a lot of people commute to far places, and that makes them appreciate the security of the small local community. I think the authorities should be concerned with the same thing; creating solid local societies and safe places for children to grow up. As the interest for international issues grow, the base becomes more and more important. If you are going to travel far away, you need to be secure of who you are and what you are going back to.

(Informant I)

It may be true that time and space is less relevant in a globalized world with increased transplanetary connectivity. On the other hand, globalization has increased the value of personal, social and psychological security. Local affiliation and identity has become more important. It is my belief that it is this intrinsic search for security that has come to benefit the ultra-local newspapers. Through rituals, building identity, filtering news and citizen empowerment, the ultra-local newspapers give people a sense of security.

We will experience that people travel and move more in future. But I think they will choose to take the local paper with them. In our days, people's lives are less tied to one physical place. I still believe many will want to keep their local newspaper, even if they do not really need to know what movies are showing in the local cinema. People want an overview, they want to keep their ties to the local society even if they happen to live elsewhere.

(Informant K)

Herman Bausinger describes how modern life is characterized by lack of transparency, irritating cross-pressures and complex structures, something that forces individuals to work out their own ways of life again and again. That means the liberty to decide, but at the same time, insecurity (Bausinger, 1999).

And this fosters the need of transparent configurations, stable social relations and networks, but also a stable and trustworthy background. It is primary this need which provokes and produces the longing for, and the consciousness of, a firm *cultural identity*.

(Bausinger, 1999:19)

It could very well be because of globalization, and not despite globalization, that there is an increasing demand for local news. Informant B holds that opinion, and I share his view.

It is because of globalization that the ultra-local newspapers will stand solid in future. People need breathing space in a globalized world.

(Informant B)

When the wide world becomes too complicated, too big and too hard to handle, it is natural to reach for something that is near and dear. After all, our physical body binds us human beings to earth and to one place at a time. At the same time, we tend to seek mental comfort in knowing that our immediate surroundings are safe and secure. Television-journalist Anne Lindmo said it like this in the Friday night talks how *Nytt på nytt* on Norwegian national television:

When I am feeling worried, I check out my local paper on the internet. That makes me so calm. They haven't written one single word on Nina Karin Monsen⁴ or the swine-influenza. The local newspaper presents real people, real problems and real solutions.

(Lindmo in *Nytt på Nytt*, 2009)

While working on this thesis, the Norwegian 2008-catalogue of a huge multinational furniture company caught my attention (IKEA 2008). The catalogue was placed at the other

⁴ Nina Karin Monsen is a Norwegian philosopher who received an award from a foundation advocating freedom of speech after she criticized a new law allowing homosexuals to marry and have the same legal rights as heterosexual married couples. The fact that Monsen was given the award, lead to a heated debate in Norwegian national and regional media.

end of the table where I was sitting, its back facing me and giving me inspiration. On the back of the catalogue selling modern furniture to global citizens, it reads «Home is the most important place in the world». The search for local ties, a safe and secure base in a rapidly changing and complicated world has made the «near and dear» very trendy. This works to the advantage of the ultra-local newspapers that have, as Informant D said, just continued doing what they have always done.

The more globalized we become, the more important it will be to have a solid and secure base at home. The more prominent the sense of living in the global village becomes, the brighter the lights of the house we live in must shine as a beacon for identity, recognition of who we are, and affirmation of belonging. Local rituals, identity, filter and citizen empowerment all add up to explain the appeal that ultra-local media have in our global reality: The ultra-local newspapers provide people with a sense of security, so they can stand on solid ground in a changing world.

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LIST OF INFORMANTS

Informant A: male, 65 years, professor of media science. Has previously been a researcher at the Institutt for Journalistikk (Norwegian Institute of Journalism). Interview made 20.10.2008.

Informant B: male, 41 years, sales manager and director of information in Landslaget for Lokalaviser (National Association of Local Newspapers). Interview made 20.10.2008.

Editor C: male, 43 years, editor and manager of a newspaper that publishes two days a week. Interview made 05.01.2009.

Informant D: male, 61 years, managing director of a local newspaper and owner/co-owner of six local newspapers. Chairman of the board of Mediebedriftenes Landsforbund (Norwegian Media Businesses' Association). He is also Vice President and member of the Executive Committee of the European Newspaper Publishers' Association. Previous editor of a paper that publishes three days a week. Interview made 05.01.2009.

Editor E: male, 37 years, editor and manager of a newspaper that publishes two days a week. Interview made 06.01.2009.

Editor F: female, 41 years, editor and manager of a newspaper that publishes two days a week. Interview made 08.01.2009.

Editor G: male, 60 years, chief editor of newspaper that publishes three days a week. Interview made 08.01.2009.

Editor H: male, 40 years, editor and manager of newspaper that publishes two days a week. Interview made 09.01.2009.

Informant I: male, 53 years, general secretary of the Landslaget for Lokalaviser (National Association of Local Newspapers). Has previously worked as editor of a local newspaper. Interview made 12.01.2009.

Informant J: male, 61 years, sociologist and Associate Professor at the University of Stavanger. Has previously worked as editor of a newspaper that publishes once a week. Interview made 21.01.2009.

Informant K: male, 55 years, member of the Norwegian Parliament. Has previously worked as a journalist and editor of a newspaper that publishes three days a week. Interview made 20.02.2009.

Informant L: female, 63 years, lawyer and local politician. Interview made 03.02.2009.

INTERVIEW SCHEMES

INTERVIEW-GUIDE FOR EDITORS

(translated from Norwegian)

GENERAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are local news important? If yes, why?
- 2) What is «the project» of making an ultra-local newspaper?
- 3) What functions do the local newspapers have?
 - a) traditionally
 - b) in today's society
 - c) in future
- 4) How do you look at the ultra-local newspapers?
- 5) How do you think other people look at the ultra-local newspapers?
 - a) How do other media-actors and editors look upon the ultra-local newspapers?
 - b) How do the readers look upon the ultra-local papers?
 - c) How do politicians and authorities look upon the ultra-local newspapers?
 - d) How do the local informants look upon the ultra-local papers?
- 6) Have the ultra-local newspapers changed? If yes, when and how have they changed?
- 7) Why do you think the ultra-local newspapers have changed?
- 8) Why is the local newspaper so important in Norway?
- 9) Do you see anything that can threaten the position of the ultra-local newspapers?
- 10) What do you find is the greatest threat to the ultra-local newspapers?
- 11) What mistakes do you think local editors and media leaders have to take care not to make in order to experience success in future?
- 12) Which local media/newspapers do you think will do best in the years to come?
- 13) Which adjustments do local newspapers have to make in order to be successful in future?

- 14) How do you reflect upon local media and globalization?
- 15) Will there be need for ultra-local newspapers in a global reality where people relate more and more to the whole world in their daily lives?
- 16) If yes on question 17, why do you think there will be need for local media in a globalized world?
- 17) Do you have a specific personal opinion or idea of how local media should be?

SPECIFIC FOR YOUR NEWSPAPER:

- 18) Why is the ultra-local newspaper so important in your community/communities?
- 19) What is the target-group of your newspaper?
 - a) What group was the target-group for your paper in the past?
 - b) What is the present target-group?
 - c) Do you think this will change in future?
- 20) If the target-group of your newspaper has changed, why is the paper now attempting to attract new groups of readers?
- 21) What do you consider the greatest threat to the future existence of your newspaper?
- 22) What do you think about your newspaper and globalization? Do you see globalization in your community and neighbourhood? How?
- 23) Does globalization represent a threat to your newspaper? Why or why not?
- 24) If you think that the ultra-local newspapers will survive in a globalized world, why do you think so? What needs do the ultra-local newspaper satisfy that cannot be met elsewhere?
- 25) Is the content of your newspaper in any way influenced by the globalization-process? If yes, how? Can you give me any examples?

PERSONAL ATTITUDE TO GLOBALIZATION:

- 26) How do you personally look at globalization?
- 27) Have you become more «global» the last few years?
- 28) Do you think your personal attitude towards globalization influences the newspaper and its contents?

INTERVIEW-GUIDE FOR OTHER INFORMANTS

(Translated from Norwegian)

GENERAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Is local news important? If yes, why?
- 2) What is «the project» of making an ultra-local newspaper?
- 3) What functions do the local newspapers have?
 - a) traditionally
 - b) in today's society
 - c) in future
- 4) How do you look at the ultra-local newspapers?
- 5) How do you think other people look at the ultra-local newspapers?
 - a) How do other media-actors and editors look upon the ultra-local newspapers?
 - b) How do the readers look upon the ultra-local papers?
 - c) How do politicians and authorities look upon the ultra-local newspapers?
 - d) How do the local informants look upon the ultra-local papers?
- 6) Have the ultra-local newspapers changed? If yes, when and how have they changed?
- 7) Why do you think the ultra-local newspapers have changed?
- 8) Why is the local newspaper so important in Norway?
- 9) Do you see anything that can threaten the position of the ultra-local newspapers?
- 10) What do you find is the greatest threat to the ultra-local newspapers?
- 11) What mistakes do you think local editors and media leaders have to take care not to make in order to experience success in future?
- 12) Which local media/newspapers do you think will do best in the years to come?
- 13) Which adjustments do local newspapers have to make in order to be successful in future?
- 14) How do you reflect upon local media and globalization?
- 15) Will there be need for ultra-local newspapers in a global reality where people relate more and more to the whole world in their daily lives?

16) If yes on question 17, why do you think there will be need for local media in a globalized world?

17) Do you have a specific personal opinion or idea of how local media should be?

18) What is the target-group of the ultra-local newspapers?

- a) Was the target-group different in the past?
- b) What is it like now?
- c) Do you think this will change in future?